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FATHER AND SON

LAURENCE NORTH

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**THE GOLIGHTLYS:
FATHER & SON**

LAURENCE NORTH

THE GOLIGHTLYS: FATHER & SON

BY

LAURENCE NORTH

AUTHOR OF "SYRINX," "IMPATIENT GRISELDA," ETC.

**NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY**

112

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TO
ADRIAN HAYTER
WHO WROTE
THE PROFITABLE IMBROGLIO
I DEDICATE
THIS SMALL THANK-OFFERING

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BOOK I.
[THE BEGINNING

CHAPTER I

A SELF-MADE MAN

THE world had gone very well with Mr. Potiphar Golightly.

His only real trouble in life had been his Christian or rather his Egyptian name. For that he could never forgive his excellent parents. They had belonged to a small and now almost forgotten sect, the Strict Scripturals, who followed a particular code of parental duty. When a child was born to a Strict Scriptural, he was bound to open the Bible at random and choose the first name his eye lighted on. If he saw a girl's name first and the infant happened to be a boy, he might try again until the sex was suited. "Suited" was the word; for nice literary sense was uncommon among the Strict Scripturals, and the phrase did not jar upon their nerves. Only one or two names might not be chosen. The chief of these were Satan, Beelzebub, Jezebel, and Judas. If a place-name appeared it had to be taken. Mr. Golightly's father had been called Armageddon.

In itself Potiphar is a distinguished name with a fine suggestion of the upper military classes. But it has suffered by association. In his childhood that did not trouble Mr. Golightly. But abbreviation did. The boys of his native village called him Potty. When he became a young man, the girls fought shy of him, and for a long time he could not discover the reason. It did not

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come home to him in all its bitterness until long after he had left the sphere in which he was born.

Potiphar left that sphere gradually. He was what his mother called "fond of his book." He read everything he could find, and his parents hoped that one day he might become a Strict Scriptural Preacher. His mother dreamed of the Rev. Potiphar Golightly. But with all his reading, the boy was not serious, except about one thing, the least spiritual of all, yet needful. His father, who had prospered as the general merchant of Marsh-by-the-Pound, kept him at school much longer than the other boys of his class. The schoolmaster had nothing against Potiphar, he gave no trouble, and if he was not brilliant, he was at least intelligent. He had a moderate gift for English composition. One day he begged to be allowed to learn shorthand. The Rev. Elihu Grubb had remarked one Sunday evening at supper that he always wrote his sermons in shorthand, otherwise his pen could never capture his lightning thought, and young Potiphar put the words in his pocket. Taking the wish as a sign of a coming vocation, old Armageddon said, "By all means." So Potiphar learned the art of Pitman. On the sly he read and sometimes tried to write stories about highwaymen.

Then the blow fell. One half-holiday, when Potiphar was sixteen, he told his mother that he was going to walk over to Brierly, the nearest town. Nothing could be more innocent. It was even convenient, and Mrs. Golightly burdened her son with several small commissions.

When he returned late in the evening, Potiphar had the air of a man with a secret. At supper-time he un-

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locked his heart. He had heard that the *Brierly Guardian* wanted a junior reporter. He had applied for the post, and was accepted. That was all. Nothing would turn him from his purpose. His mother cried over the vanished dream of the Rev. Potiphar. His father reasoned and prayed. Then he thought it would be best to let Potty have his fling. He would soon get tired and come back to the fat paths of the ministry with its easy duties and comfortable round of homely hospitality among the brethren. Mr. Golightly often wished he had taken to preaching instead of grocery. However, that was all past and done with. Potiphar would adorn the pulpit in good time. Armageddon gave his son a great deal of sound advice about the temptations of his new life, warned him that reporters were usually men of dissolute life, and persuaded him to sign the pledge. Finally he added his blessing, and hoped for the day of the prodigal's return.

But Potiphar never returned. His career was one long triumph of mediocrity. For literature he cared nothing; he did not understand it. But for certain printed things he cared a great deal. They were merchandise. People could be made to buy them, if they were served up in the right way. That he never forgot. From the *Brierly Guardian* he went to the *Crockchester Chronicle*, and thence to London. There he met Hiram Adderley. Hiram was a good deal older than Potiphar. He had left Marsh-by-the-Pound when Potty was still quite a little boy. He had "got on," as the saying is, in a nice little cheesemonger's business up in Holloway. Hiram and Potiphar met again casually at a political meeting in North London. One of them happened to

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say something about Marsh-by-the-Pound, and recognitions followed. After that Potty went very often to the Adderleys on Sunday afternoons.

Hiram had laid by a little money. He meant to put more beside it, but he liked a mild speculation. When Potiphar first tried to pour poison into his ears he resisted, but he returned to the idea.

"I tell ye," Potiphar said, "there's money in it. Here's a big public just learnin' to read, and nothink to read. Think it over, Adderley."

Adderley thought it over. Next Sunday he let the tempter speak again.

"Look 'ere, Adderley," Potiphar said. "Did you ever think o' all the loose ha'pence going about the world?"

Adderley sighed and said he had; but that didn't help 'im much.

"There you make a big mistake. See, here's an errand-boy with a ha'penny in his pocket. How am I to get it?"

Adderley shook his head and took another pull at his beer.

"Give 'im a paper 'e'll like, and his ha'penny's yours. See! Then next day, or the day after, 'e'll 'ave another ha'penny. Shove another paper under 'is nose. Balance in favour of you, penny less ex'es, of course, but that's the 'ole thing in a nutshell. Think o' the thousands of errand-boys in the country."

"Expensive game, though, to start," Adderley said meditatively.

"Needn't be so very expensive. We'd begin small. You make me editor an' pay me no more screw than what I'm gettin' on the *Signal*. I know one or two artis'

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chaps'll do the drorins dirt cheap, and I can tell you where to get cheap printin' too. About the distribution we'll need to use a bit o' palm-oil in the right quarters—I'll tell you where at the right time."

"Wot about the writin'—the stuff."

Potiphar shut one eye. "At first, I'm going to do that. Oh, I can write lovely bloods, done it since I was at school."

"Lovely wot?" Adderley asked, startled.

"Bloods! 'Ealthy tales o' wild adventure. My eye! there's the title for the series ready made. We must be 'ealthy. It pays. Trust me to make 'em sit up."

Adderley listened and yielded. He did not tell his wife that his thoughts had soared beyond cheesemongering.

In due time from a back-room in Fleet Street issued "Healthy Tales of Wild Adventure," No. 1: *The Fatal Tomahawk, or the Redskin's Revenge*, by Rufus Raymond, ½d. For next week: *Bet of Howling Gulch Saloon, or the Gold-seeker's Bride*, by Albert E. Willoughby. See that you get it. A halfpenny well spent is a halfpenny earned.

The start of No. 1 was an anxious time for Proprietor and Editor. But Potiphar, *alias* Raymond, *alias* Willoughby, had not studied the machinery in vain. He went round the railway bookstalls and bought up the issue diplomatically to ensure a "repeat" order. The schoolboy, and, in his place outside the smaller news-agent's window, the butcher-boy, responded to the bait loyally. Raymond, likewise Willoughby, knew how to touch his reader's heart. The drorin' on the outside (done dirt cheap) did the rest. "Healthy Tales of Wild

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Adventure" found their mark. The inevitable moment of reaction about the sixth week was tided over successfully, and the new venture sailed to victory. Adderley's heart was glad. He agreed cheerfully when Potiphar suggested that he might now be paid a trifle over his editorial salary for writing "the stuff." Later he would find some smart young chap to do it; he knew plenty, but for the present it was safest in his own hands.

About a year later, when the "'Ealthies," as the Proprietor called them, were firmly established, Potiphar suggested another series. He would not, however, go into details until Adderley gave him in writing a promise of half-shares in the whole concern. Hiram grumbled a little at first. "Who found the money?" he asked.

"Who found the brains?" Potiphar demanded.

"That ain't much," Hiram objected. "Stringin' words together's easily learnt."

"All right," Potiphar said good-humouredly. "'Ealthy Tales' dries up next number."

"You'll be out of a berth."

"Oh, I'll easy get another. The trade knows what a success the 'Ealthies' 'as been. I shaun't starve."

They left it there for the night. Hiram reflected that he did not know the ropes. He didn't even know where to find a smart young chap to carry on. Next morning he strolled into the office.

"'Ere's your contract," he said, carelessly laying down an official bill-head of the Cheese Emporium in Holloway. On it he had scrawled the agreement.

Potiphar thanked him and put the paper in his pocket. At lunch-time he went along to Somerset House and had it stamped.

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The new series, "Happy Half-Hours. Healthy Tales for Young Ladies," appealed to the domestic servant, and found its billet as easily as the "Healthy Tales." Potiphar had, of course, been inundated with MSS. for his first series. During the year he had not used many of these, but he watched the writers closely. Something of everything had been offered to him, even stories for girls, so little does the average contributor consider the "line" of a publication. Consequently, when he was ready to assail womankind, P. Golightly (he was gradually sinking the Potiphar) had his ammunition ready. He sent for Miss Charteris and Miss Jelks, whose names were noted in his address book, and agreed with them for a "complete novel" once a fortnight. Three pounds ten for a story of 30,000 words, with a page of Fashion Gossip by Lady Celia thrown in. Miss Charteris was elderly, her forte was the sentimental love-story of humble life. Miss Jelks, who was young, professed to know society like a book; she wrote of duchesses as one to the manner born. Both ladies, who did not know of each other's existence, lived in great penury in Bloomsbury. They thought Mr. Golightly a perfect angel, and saw a long-dreamed-of holiday realised at last.

The firm of Adderley and Golightly began to feel its feet. Further ventures followed, and as business increased larger premises were required. Five years later they had a shop window in Fetter Lane full of the firm's publications. Sentiment, Adventure, the Comic Muse, Fashion, lent their kindly aid to moderate prosperity. But the house was not yet great. Then Golightly made the discovery of his life.

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Hiram, desperately resolved to live up to his literary interests, had developed a mania for cutting choice things out of newspapers and pasting them into a scrap-book. He spent whole Sunday afternoons over his treasures. Potiphar watched him with a reflective eye.

One afternoon Hiram, who had taken a villa at Hornsey Rise, looked at his partner over the top of his folio.

"Listen 'ere, Potty," he said (Golightly could not cure Adderley of saying "Potty"), "I calls this really interestin'."

From the scrap-book he read unctuously:

"In the Victoria Bridge, Montreal, there are 7,895,239 bolts, 30,000 steel girders, and the weight of the entire tubular sections is 3,000,000 tons. The work occupied seven years, and the entire cost was £3,000,000 sterling, or £1 per ton. The girders placed end to end would reach half round the globe."

"Think o' that now!"

Potiphar did think, of that, and more.

"I say, Hirie," he remarked (Hirie was always his reply to Potty), "we'll print one of your scrap-books, properly edited, of course, in weekly parts like a magazine. We must have a story in it, but beyond that we needn't pay a red cent for the literary matter." As he saw prosperity increase, Potiphar had dreams of social improvement for himself. He had grown careful about his speech, and only came to grief now and then over an occasional "h" in a difficult place. Such a phrase as "the healing art" was troublesome, but he had little occasion to use it. "We'll call it *Golightly's Scrap-Book*," he added, after a pause.

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"*Adderley's Scrap-Book*, you mean, Potty."

"No offence, Hirie, but your name *won't do*. It isn't cheerful enough soundin'. Now mine happens to be the very thing—'*Golightly!*' That'll hit the young man at the station off for a holiday. Have you seen *Golightly's* this week? It's stunnin'. You've got the 'l' and the 'y,' anyhow, Hiram."

And with that Hiram had to be content.

Golightly's Scrap-Book "sounded a new note." The statistical mind of the clerk and the small trader found in it abundance of food. Householders in Tooting and Balham discussed its wisdom over the garden fence in the cool of the evening. "Let me see now, was it fifty million cabbages that would stretch to the moon, or forty-five and a half? I'll just run in for *Golightly's*. 'E's got it all down." Humorous anecdotes, cookery, and a love story pleased the householder's womankind. *Golightly's* became a national institution, like the Crystal Palace, the Albert Memorial, and Handel's "Messiah." It insured you against battle, murder, and sudden death, it was an ever-handly calculator. It told you what to do in case of fire, burns, scalds, and apoplexy. It supplied you with "A Little Sermon," and the choicest American poetry on the back page. It invited you to compete for untold wealth, for a family vault, a cottage in the country and happy holidays on the Continent. It took its readers to Rome and gave them the run of the Coliseum and the Catacombs, it led them up the Swiss Mountains by rail, it sent one fortunate dry-goods clerk to Japan, another to Timbuctoo, and a third to Jericho. The general intelligence of the British public rose by leaps and bounds, its mental horizon, long limited by

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the back-garden, now stretched from China to Peru. Golightly had become the universal provider of information for his fellows. The panting Education Office toiled after him in vain.

And withal to the fortunate proprietors came wealth.

Yet for a time Mr. Golightly was not happy. Motor-cars were not yet invented, or he might have found in speed that solace which his soul desired. As it was, he nursed a secret sorrow. Since the "Happy Half-Hours" began he had cherished the young and gentle image of Miss Jelks, who knew Society like a book and wrote of duchesses as one to the manner born. With her he could scale any social height, unafraid. The first day he saw her he had known his fate, but being the man he was, he went to work warily. He need never have seen her again. Miss Jelks sent her "copy" in regularly and punctually. It was always satisfactory. The duchesses were beautiful and bad or good, as the story required. The heroes were paladins of romance. The villains had the right devilish-fatal look and manner. They wore evening-clothes at all hours, and only ceased toying with an eyeglass to take up a revolver. Miss Jelks was inexhaustible. That so sweet a creature should know so much of a sinful world only made her more adorable. She might have stayed always in Bloomsbury writing her daily task, but "her Editor" was exacting, pleasantly exacting. He liked to talk over her next plot with her. At first she grudged the time, but she would not offend Mr. Golightly. At last she came to like the fortnightly consultation. Sometimes they went out to tea together. Once or twice they dined and went to the play. Then one day, having discovered another Mistress of Duch-

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esses to carry on the good work, Mr. Golightly spoke.

"Amelia," he said quietly. It had been Amelia for some time.

"Yes, Mr. Golightly." Miss Jelks' pretty brown head drooped. She was very pretty, of a full type that gave promise of "a fine woman" one day, if she had fair play and surcease of drudgery.

"Would you like to give up the stories?"

"But what else can I do?" she asked, looking up with alarm in her eyes.

"A great deal, my dear!"

"I can only do Fashions, and I don't like them half so well."

"That isn't quite what I mean."

Miss Jelks looked at Potiphar without understanding. She tapped the floor with her foot.

"Perhaps the public's tired of me," she sighed. "Have you found someone else?"

"Yes, but only if you care to do what I'm thinking of."

Miss Jelks rose.

"I feared it couldn't last. It's hard, but it's always the way in literature. Good-bye, Mr. Golightly. Still, I'd do it for three pounds, or even two-ten, to keep the work. What's the other thing, however?"

"Will you marry me, Amelia?"

"Oh, Mr. Golightly!"

"Go away!" the Editor thundered, pitching the ruler at the office-boy who broke in inopportunely.

"Can't you knock, you idiot?"

"Now tell me, please," Miss Jelks said, when the boy vanished headlong, "what am I to call you? What

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does P. stand for. I never could find out, and I've been *so* curious."

"It's — it's — Potiphar!"

Miss Jelks burst into tears.

"I'm afraid it's all over," she said, wiping her eyes.

"I really couldn't."

"Couldn't what, Amelia darling?"

"Marry you, after all."

"But why not, my angel?"

"People would call me Mrs. Potiphar!"

Then Golightly understood. Like a wise man, however, he did not press his suit for the moment, and Miss Jelks returned sadly to her Duchesses.

CHAPTER II

MR. STEPNEY DISPENSES WITH IDEALS

IN the end, however, the invincible Golightly conquered.

He and Amelia were very happy. The rise of Golightly's to real prosperity gave her everything she wanted, and in her turn she did a great deal for Potiphar — Pharie, she called him. She was almost a lady; at any rate, she was able to hold her own in the circles to which the great adventurer's money now gave him the *entrée*, and she picked up things she hadn't quite understood before so quickly that very soon she could go anywhere. Little mistakes Potiphar had made in dress and manner she cured gently and effectually. The Adderley side of the house was gradually eliminated, and finally Hiram, now a widower, was content to retire, with his only daughter, Kitty, to a desirable place he had bought up the river, and to leave the whole of the firm's affairs in his partner's good hands. In the end he allowed himself to be bought out handsomely. Golightly marched forward from victory to victory. At last he bought a reputable daily paper in order to consolidate his position.

The paper, although respectable, was languishing. It needed "life," Potiphar said. He began the revival by a wholesale dismissal of the existing staff, and turned into the gutter of Fleet Street a score or two of potential

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but negligible enemies. They swore awhile in bitter futility, and then drifted to other servitudes, where they forgot their old grievances in new. All save two. Of these one saw a better way than the nursing of revenge. Dorian Stepney was a young man of parts with whom the world had gone hardly. Just because he was a young man of parts he found it difficult to get on. He was well educated, and had some taste in letters. That had served him ill hitherto because he had been faithful to it. When notice of dismissal came, he reflected upon his way of life. What was the use of ideals? None in the world. He had some wits and a pen to sell. If he used that pen with his tongue in his cheek he could still serve Potiphar Golightly, who seemed to him the grand refutation of ideals. After all, ideals were only of use to people with money. People with money did not seem to care much about them; still people with money might. Stepney had no money. Therefore his ideals must be postponed. Until then, Potiphar. So to Potiphar he went.

It was not easy to get an interview. Mr. Golightly had long ceased to be accessible. Already he was hedged about by two secretaries, one without, one within; to say nothing of the medalled commissioner at the door. Had Mr. Stepney an appointment? Mr. Stepney had not. He must therefore write and beg an appointment.

That meant loss of time. Mr. Golightly was making up his new staff hourly, and delays were dangerous. Lunch-time was at hand. The intrepid Dorian lay in wait outside. Hard lines if the great man lunched in his room. But, no. A carriage drove up at ten minutes to

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one, and a charming figure flitted into the office. At one precisely Mr. and Mrs. Golightly came out. Dorian heard the directions given to the coachman. It was the Savoy.

Stepney dressed well. He was more than presentable in appearance. In his pocket, luckily, he had a couple of sovereigns, counters for his throw. His game was made. A hansom bore him to the restaurant close in the wake of the Golightly chariot. He found a table not far from the devoted lovers, and spent an hour of amusement watching their survival of youth. Mrs. Golightly had seen ten years of matrimony and nine of maternity without any concessions to time. Golightly himself, now turned five-and-forty, wore well and bore himself gallantly. He was well groomed and quite as other men. Once or twice Stepney caught a fugitive "Amelior," when a vowel following the final "a" required a bridge, but that was all, and the habit is favoured, as Dorian well knew, even by some Oxford dons. There was nothing in it.

Lunch came to an end. Golightly lit a fat cigar and looked at his watch.

"Time I was off, my dear," he said. "Reorganisation."

"Have you found your new editor for the *Beacon*?"

"No, that's just it. Scores of men, but none of them right. You see we want a chap who's a bit toney. Young too."

"Don't say 'toney,' Pharie."

"All right; but it's the only word, you know, darling."

"I suppose so," Mrs. Golightly admitted, with a faint sigh. "But why not say 'good form'?"

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"Well, well, Ameliar, all right, all right." He laughed good-humouredly, and called for the bill.

It was Amelia's fad, but for the life of him he couldn't quite see what it mattered. However, she knew about these things, and he supposed it was somehow important. Before she took him in hand he had been black-balled once at the Excelsior. The second time he got in easily. He fancied privately that his great increase in prosperity between the two elections had more to do with it than niceties of speech and manner, but — well — it was all moonshine. He wished he had that new staff complete. That was the really important thing. Now who the deuce was this? He couldn't for the life of him remember the chap. "What's his name, Amelia?" he whispered in a stage aside.

But Amelia shook her head.

"Forgive me, Mr. Golightly, but can you spare me a moment? My name's Stepney, Dorian Stepney."

"Ah, yes, of course. How do you do, Mr. Stepney? Delighted to see you."

Potiphar held out his hand. Stepney meant nothing to him; he had not concerned himself about the names of the discharged. They met so many people nowadays in society that one couldn't remember everybody. But Potiphar prided himself upon his Napoleonic talent for recalling names and faces. He would never acknowledge defeat.

"We met, I think, at Lady ——"

"Windover's," struck in the ready Dorian, who read his *Morning Post* to profit."

"Ah, yes, yes, yes, to be sure. Let me introduce you to my wife, Mr. Stepney."

STEPNEY DISPENSES WITH IDEALS

"I called at the office this morning, but you were engaged six or seven deep."

"Oh, business, business!" sighed Potiphar. "So sorry, Mr. Stepney. I've to keep a fence up, you see — so many adventurers about to waste one's time —"

"Quite so. One quite understands that."

"Come back with me now, will you?" said Potiphar. He liked the look of this young man. What his business might be he couldn't imagine. But he stood a little in awe of the young bloods he met in the great world, and always tried to be civil to casual social acquaintances, who had their uses. If this young fellow-me-lad was only a crank or a genteel beggar, he could easily settle him without loss of time.

"I'll walk back to the office, Amelia."

He saw his wife into her carriage, the men lifted their hats, and Golightly turned to his solicitant. "Well, Mr. Stepney, and what can I do for you?"

"Make me editor of the *Beacon*."

Mr. Golightly stopped short and looked his man up and down.

"But you're a gentleman," he began; "I mean, a young man about town, aren't you?"

"Possibly; the more use to you then."

"Um! Any experience?"

"Yes, just been sacked by you from the *Beacon*, as it is."

"And celebrated being fired with a Savoy lunch! I like that. How long have you been on the paper?"

"Three years."

"What did you do?"

"Nothing. Hadn't a chance under old Screwby."

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"Eh! I fancy you're right. What *can* you do?"

"What *you* want."

"And that is?"

"Make it a real live up-to-date journal and yet keep it on the old high level, without the dullness."

"Well, suppose I put you into the chair to-night, what would you come out with to-morrow?"

"I happen to know that Sir Bradford Stingo is in town trying on the quiet to upset the Copper Concessions Arbitration Scheme."

"Have you the facts?" Potiphar had risen upon metaphorical hind-legs. He had his own reasons for desiring the success of the Copper Concessions.

"Yes."

"What do you propose to do?"

"Send a man up to interview Stingo, that man being myself."

"Well?"

"Sir Bradford can't resist a chance of publicity."

"I know. But you won't get him to talk about the copper ——"

"I don't intend to try."

"Then what the deuce, my dear young friend, is the use of your interview?"

"Wait! I'm coming to that. The paper will contain ——"

"*Will* contain?"

"Yes, *will* contain a complete exposure of the plot against the Copper Concessions, but no names mentioned. It will be followed immediately by the interview — scareheaded thus:

STEPNEY DISPENSES WITH IDEALS

“ ‘IMPORTANT INTERVIEW WITH SIR BRADFORD STINGO.
His Significant Silence on the Copper Question.’

“To those in the know that’ll pretty well burst his game.”

Mr. Golightly again looked his man up and down.

“Where’s Stingo to be found?” he asked.

“Carlton.”

“Jump along, then, and do the interview. Then come back to the office at once and write up your exposure ——”

“But about the editorship?”

“It’s yours ——”

“And the trifling detail of salary ——”

“Say seven-fifty until we see ——”

“Make it a thousand on a three years’ agreement — with fifty rise on every ten thousand of increased circulation.”

“Split the difference.”

“No.”

Mr. Golightly pondered for a moment, tracing patterns in the gutter with his gold-headed cane. Then he looked up.

“Done!” he said. “Expect you in an hour or so.”

“One moment, Mr. Golightly. Things move rapidly nowadays. Would you mind giving me a mere jotting on a leaf of your pocket-book — a formal offer which I’ll accept in writing, here and now?”

“That’s business,” Golightly said heartily. He scribbled the memorandum. Stepney, of the other part, scribbled also.

They exchanged notes.

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"Don't be long," said Golightly. "There will be a good deal to talk about when you get back."

And thus Mr. Dorian Stepney, sometime scholar of Craven College, Oxford, was lifted out of the gutter by his wits and incidentally by means of the Golightly gold-headed cane.

CHAPTER III

REFLECTIONS OF A RENEGADE

THE *Beacon*, reharmonised in the Dorian mode, made golden music for the house of Golightly. Its popularity, thanks to the vigorous and successful attack upon Stingo and his ring, was assured at one stroke, and in six months the circulation had become fabulous. Its advertising space, valued at a king's ransom, was indispensable to everyone who had anything to sell. Enemies said the paper was unscrupulous, but they were antediluvian fogies, who clung to a fetish of dignity and decency, wherein, as wise men knew, there was no reward. Old ideals, as Golightly said, are only fit for the scrap-heap, and thither he sent them with a good conscience.

"We must march with the times," said Golightly.

"And be, if possible, a little in advance of Greenwich," was the Dorian antiphon.

"Quite so," Mr. Golightly agreed, and gradually the *Beacon* perfected the science of intelligent anticipation until its delighted readers found that for the most part they were enabled every breakfast-time to enjoy to-morrow's news.

"Yesterday," said Golightly, "is a dead donkey."

"Let us cease to beat him," chorused Stepney, "and remember that to-day also is *in articulo mortis*."

"How much?" inquired the proprietor.

"A deadly article," the editor translated, very freely.

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"Ah, very good, very good. A deadly article. I like the way, Dorian, that you combine ancient learning with sound modern business views."

Stepney, had he not been long past such weaknesses, would have blushed. As it was, he bent a front of brass upon his chief, and went on to unfold further sound modern business views. His facility was little short of a miracle. Ideas, as the *Beacon* understood such, seemed to come to him by spontaneous generation. He made it a rule to have at the very least two ideas a day. They came without agonising. He could have had half a dozen quite as easily, but he was an economist as well as a genius. Two of his ideas were all that even the *Beacon* could stand in twenty-four hours. They were its life. It must not be over-vitalised. Too much oxygen, Dorian knew, was as bad as too little. He applied the nitrogen of proper caution lest the *Beacon* should flare up and expire in a flash of superlative brilliancy. He had learned to deny himself. There was that in Dorian which understood and appreciated the "really excellent," but he put it from him stoutly, or, rather, he knew exactly when to say to it, "thus far and no farther." Then, of course, it ceased to be the really excellent, but that way fortune lay. And in time he no longer cared for it jealously, as a man cares for a beloved mistress.

Thus prospering by the wages of his intellectual prostitution, Dorian went on from strength to strength as the world accounted such. Fewer and fewer grew the moments when he remembered his young ideals, and the letters he exchanged with his old tutor, Ray Seneschal, grew rarer and more rare. Yet he recalled at times with a vague discomfort one of their last interviews. In the

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early days of his so-called "literary" life in London, he had set the scene down as an exercise in fiction. No editor would accept it. One of the most eminent, who held almost the last outpost of splendid tradition, returned it with a charming letter. "Such a choice of Hercules," he wrote, "is, alas! all too frequent and too true, but the incident has scarcely enough 'body' for my magazine."

One idle Saturday evening Dorian took out the faded sheets and glanced at them, half in contempt. They might as well go into the fire. Why cumbered they the desk? But the old fascination of one's own bantlings seized him. Wondering at the contrast between these days and those, he began to live over again the incident he had recorded. He did not read the futile pages, but their contents took shape, dream-wise, in his memory. He saw the chief actors under the names he had given them. He himself seemed to stand apart from his own portrait.

"The Rev. Herbert Vane Dormer's rooms were in the second quadrangle opposite Frazer's. You reached them by one steep flight of stairs; then you turned to the right and knocked.

"A pleasant voice cried almost boyishly, 'Come in,' the accent rising on the last word. By the time the door was opened Mr. Dormer was absorbed in his work again, and you had to arouse him by some device more or less ingenious. It answered very well to close the door with a snap.

"Frazer knew the ceremony by heart. He could forecast the slight start, the half turn round, the kindly

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smile and the genial 'Ah, Frazer' with which his tutor would welcome him.

"'Sit down, sit down.' Mr. Dormer swung further round and waved his visitor to a chair. 'Make yourself a cigarette.' He reached back towards his writing-table for the tobacco-jar and papers. 'Beautiful day, is it not, but rather too oppressive now. I looked for you after chapel. I wanted you to walk with me as far as the Botanic Gardens, and come back to breakfast, but you were nowhere to be seen. What a perfect June morning it was! Ah, you want a light, don't you? On the shelf there.'

"Although he could guess very well why his tutor had sent for him, Frazer knew that Mr. Dormer must come to the point in his own way. He did not try to force the conversation.

"'As I couldn't find you, I went with Mr. Rashleigh instead. I happened to say to him that I wondered anyone could leave Oxford. He said it was well some could, otherwise there would be no getting ends to meet, a hard enough matter in these times. I told him that was the plague of being Bursar — no pleasant transcendental fancies of an Oxford where no one ever goes down — always pounds, shillings, and pence.'

"'A necessary evil, however,' Frazer remarked, shrugging his shoulders and taking refuge in the obvious.

"'I dislike the phrase. No evil is necessary. As for the thing we call money, it is not an evil in so far as it is necessary. When it becomes an evil it is no longer necessary. We so often forget that it is not money that is the root of all evil — we behead the verse — it is the *love* of money.'

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“‘Some would say the lack,’ Frazer suggested.

“‘*Malesuada Fames, ac turpis Egestas,*’ Mr. Dormer quoted, ‘and there is something to be said for Virgil’s view. Still, the harm born of penury is nothing to that of avarice.’

“‘Still, sir, penury hinders a man.’

“‘So it seems, sometimes.’

“‘Seems! Surely it’s real enough? Look at Stair. First-rate ability to start with, I admit, but leisure and position to make the best of it — society, travel, influence, every chance; and now, at forty, Viceroy of India! Yet, I believe as able men were up here with him. Suppose he had had to pinch along with no chance of travel, no position. Where would he have been to-day?’

“‘We cannot control those things,’ Mr. Dormer answered quietly, ‘and we must not grudge others their opportunities. But after all, Frazer, each man’s fortune lies in his own hand — even Stair’s. He had his own difficulties. How easy for him to have become idle and luxurious. You and I, Frazer, were cursed with the blessed necessity of fighting our own way in the world.’

“‘And the curse,’ said Frazer, laughing, ‘is still heavy upon me!’

“‘Thank heaven for that! At the same time a man should not rush into the fight unprepared,’ Mr. Dormer replied significantly.

“Frazer smiled. Mr. Dormer had at last come to the point.

“‘You have heard my decision?’ he asked.

“‘The Master told me last night. I’m very sorry, but of course you have considered well. Still, you must

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ask yourself whether your going down now will not cripple you in the long run. The next two years here would be very useful to a man like you, especially as you think of becoming a writer. I don't think you are wrong in that. Still'—Mr. Dormer rose and looked at an engraving on the wall—the Devil playing chess for a soul—'how many dreamers,' he sighed, 'have I seen go out from this place, hoping that they would make a name for themselves in letters. One or two succeeded—one or two; the rest, where are they? If I might advise you, Frazer,' he continued, returning to his chair, 'I would say—do anything rather than trust to your pen alone. I don't doubt your ability for a moment, but the struggle is so fierce, the market for *your* wares, to put it vulgarly, is so limited, that I fear, I fear! Of course, there's journalism pure and simple, but you're not suited for that scramble.'

"'I don't know, Mr. Dormer.'

"'No, I fear you do *not* know.' Mr. Dormer wilfully misunderstood Frazer's objection. 'On the other hand, there's no doubt excellent work to be done as a writer, if one can find the right way. But in the end it comes down to the blunt commercial question—Have you a marketable article to offer? You dislike the phrase? I understand; so do I, but it's the right one for the moment. Still, your shrinking from the mere suggestion of huckstering shows that you're quite unsuited for the rough and ready work of the Press. I hope you won't be forced to turn to that for a living.'

"'But if the living is honest, may it not do to keep body and soul together, leaving the soul to make the best of every opportunity?'

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"Mr. Dormer smiled with sweet tolerance. 'A pleasant dream, Frazer, a pleasant dream, and not a new one! I fear the soul soon dies of starvation, however well the body may fare. By the way, I spoke to Mr. Rashleigh to-day, and he tells me (this in confidence) that the college is willing to give you a little more money. We have the utmost confidence in you, and we all feel that a good degree would help you more than anything else.'

"'The college is really very good, and I'm grateful; but ought I to stake everything on a single throw? I might not take a good First—perhaps not even a First at all. Then I would start life two years hence, no better off than I am now. It would mean two years lost.'

"'Have you any definite prospect?'

"Frazer named it. Mr. Dormer's long-drawn and somewhat distant 'Ah' reminded his pupil that he was speaking to a Don. During the pause that followed, the younger man realised that a gulf had opened between himself and Mr. Dormer, between the life he had chosen and that which he was leaving behind. When the tutor spoke again his voice was a little constrained.

"'I thought you had higher ideals, Frazer. You told me once that you didn't care for teaching, but even the poorest schoolmastering is better than writing for that sort of paper. The poor schoolmaster may at least train boys to be men, but what good can anyone hope to do in frivolous and illiterate journalism? I would be the last to object to your taking up the more serious work of the Press, but that thing! I looked at it only once. It was enough. There was no harm in it

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—it would have been better if there had been—it was merely invertebrate! You, oh, Frazer, *you*—our excellent writer, poet even—*que faites vous dans cette galère?*’

“‘My dear sir——’

“Frazer had risen. Mr. Dormer rose also, and the two men stood looking into each other’s eyes; the elder strangely moved, the younger moved also, but bracing himself for defence.

“‘My dear Mr. Dormer, I have chosen. Openings are few, and if one were to pick and choose one would never get a footing at all. The start is everything. It should soon be possible to leave distasteful things behind.’

“Mr. Dormer shook his head.

“‘I hope so, Frazer, I hope so, but the start, as you say, is everything, and no man ever gets the better of a bad start. Once I should have thought as you do now. One or two men I knew took the plunge as hopefully as you are doing. One of them might have been a poet, the other a historian. To-day they are disappointed hacks. Not a line of the thousands they have written will live. The poet hasn’t turned a verse for years.’

“‘But they earn their daily bread?’

“‘As to that, I believe they are fairly well-to-do. But they live by the prostitution of their genius.’

“‘If it had been genius, don’t you think it would have got the better of the hack work? Haven’t immortal things been written in Grub Street?’

“‘Yes, but the masterpiece itself happened to be the hack work. Times have changed. To-day one can live even in affluence by the most contemptible writing.

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Good men, I know, are tempted to live by that in the hope of doing better things, at odd moments. You can't serve God and Mammon. You may sell groceries, newspapers, anything, and when the shop is shut write worthily. At the anvil or the plough you may entertain the Muses unawares; I knew an old Scotsman who wrote a great history while he kept a little news-agency; but you can't write for the papers we were talking about and do any good in literature.'

"'It's disappointing, but I must put bread before ambition. I'm too old to learn any business, and if I could, I've no chance of entering one. I'm offered a chance of keeping myself from the day I leave college. Wouldn't I be foolish to give that up for what is — forgive me — after all mere sentiment?'

"'But the college offers you more money.'

"'Not enough to make it possible to stay. It already gives me quite enough for all my wants if I could manage the outlay myself. One year's income would keep a man four years at a Scottish university.'

"'True,' Mr. Dormer agreed. 'I believe our financial system might be improved, but where are we to begin? You must do as Rome does, and the way of life here is expensive. As to going or staying, you must please yourself.'

"'Please don't think I undervalue the kind offer the college has made, but I can't take more money from the college and have to be obliged to someone else — a distant relation, perhaps, or a money-lender for more, when I can go out into the world and be independent. If there's anything in me, it will come out. If not, I can always be an honest journeyman.'

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“‘I know, I know,’ Mr. Dormer answered gently, ‘I know where the shoe pinches, and I like your spirit, Frazer. I only wish you were making a better beginning. I would rather see you doing flamboyant evening paper reporting than scribbling that soulless trash—the chatter of Green-Rooms and Bohemian Clubs, the ignorant reviews, the cunningly disguised puff. And the worst of it all is its spurious air of culture—the thing’s hypocritical and altogether damnable, yes, damnable!’

“Mr. Dormer sank back into his chair. The tremor of his thin hands showed how fierce had been his passion. He smiled at Frazer with eyes full of affection, yet deprecating his vehemence.

“‘Forgive me,’ he said, ‘I think you can understand. I hoped great things of you, Frazer. At my age hope is too rare, too precious to be given up without a struggle. It is hard to see it wantonly flung away. Now leave me, please. No, I am not ill. We shall talk again; and remember, it is not too late to change your mind.’

“Frazer was needlessly long in closing the door; for the significance of the commonplace act distressed him. ‘Poor Dormer, he cannot understand,’ he thought, as he lingered with his hand upon the latch.

“‘Poor Frazer,’ the tutor thought, ‘I would save him if I could, but he will not understand.’

“The latch clicked and the door stood fast between them.”

Yes, that was the man he had been. As for the man he had become, well, it was all in the day’s work. The door stood fast locked now. Seneschal was kind, but he was a fogey. Doddering by this time, no doubt.

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And success had brought its own sweets. After all, ideals on an empty pocket were cold comfort. Dorian looked round his pretty flat in Queen Anne's Mansions, and told himself that all was for the best in the best of all possible worlds. The editor of the *Beacon* counted for something in the world. It brought its own thrill to sway a million readers every day. It was Power, a thing no man can despise, in whatever form it comes. Dorian stretched his feet towards the fire and drew a long sigh of contentment. Well, it was amusing, perhaps instructive, to note one's own development. He would keep the MS. It was a curiosity. Smiling, he locked it away once more.

And at that moment his second leading Idea for Monday's issue leaped into his brain. *That* would make them sit up! By gad, yes! He knew by instinct the very man to carry out his wishes. Not a staff man, as it happened. Poor Punchie Hay, sacked with the rest of the old *Beacon* lot, and now living meagrely by odd jobs, could do it to a turn and be jolly glad of the chance. He'd be rushed a bit. No matter. The *Beacon* was imperious. It demanded sacrifices. Punchie mightn't be required or thought of again for months. But he was always there—in the gutter. And it was a safe three quid for him. Poor Punchie!

Dorian scribbled a long telegram, rang for the valet, and sent it off, reply paid. Then he went out to sup with Mr. and Mrs. Golightly.

When he returned shortly after midnight he found the answer, "All right. Hay." Laconic Punchie! He never wasted words.

Dorian slept the sleep of the just. Had he known exactly where, in what company, and how engaged Mr.

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James Alexander Hay, *alias* Punchie, had received his telegram, his slumbers might have been less like an infant's, pure and light.

But of those strange and momentous things Dorian was to know nothing for some time to come. They are, none the less, deeply interwoven with the texture of this history, to the making of which they are nowise unimportant.

CHAPTER IV

EMOTIONS WITHOUT A MORAL

IT was not material success alone that made Dorian's dreams pleasant. He had come from the Golightlys' supper-party with a gentle glow of excitement stirring with Golightlys' champagne in his blood. For the present it was not more than a hint, rather an absurd hint, but there it was, and one could not account for such things. A man never knew where or how he might be hit. Dorian had hitherto been too busy to indulge romantic passions. Stay, was this romantic? Why inquire? She must be thirty-six, if she was a day. But, good heavens, that was the dangerous age, was it not? especially if they had contrived to cheat the finger of old Father Time as cleverly as — tush! There was no cheating in the matter, no counterfeit, no "make-up." The Old Man with the Scythe simply hadn't had a look in, that was all.

In spite of himself, Dorian, as he undressed, hummed a threadbare tag of Ovid:

For though the younger yield you softer charms,
The elder clasp you with experienced arms.

It was ages since he had bothered with any Greek or Latin trash. There was no money in it. Why did the stupid stuff (how he had worshipped it once!) come back like this to-night? It must be old Golightly's

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champagne. His *champagne!* Well, put it that way if you like. But, of course, it was all nonsense and quite impossible.

He put out the light, got into bed, and before he fell asleep he had lived again through every detail of the supper-party.

These were the days when wealth had only just begun to find out the restaurant habit. As yet the motor-car was but a faint portent on the horizon. Certain ramshackle contrivances, noisy and evil-smelling, had been seen doing a weary stunt round a track at the Imperial Institute. Men knew that there lurked a revolutionary force, but the age of speed (on the knees of the—Devil) was still some way ahead. Potiphar, ever discerning, had said, "This is going to be a big thing." For the present, however, he would not put money into it. He did that at the right time in the dawn of that glorious Edwardian Era, in which petrol came to its own on terra firma, and then the pigs began to fly. He reaped his reward. For the present, then, the chief symptom of plutocratic restlessness was the growing restaurant habit. Home sweet home with fat and groaning sideboards was soon to be found out, discounted—a back number. At first Amelia, who had been proud of her house in Queen's Gate, did not altogether welcome the change. But Potiphar so often pleaded that business interests were better served by entertaining abroad, and then Lady Welshpoole added the last argument. It was indispensable, all the best people were doing it now. Therefore, etc., Q. E. D.

And in time Amelia came to like it. The burden of entertaining was greatly lightened, she was naturally

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ease-loving. Once upon a time, her life had been strenuous enough, but when ease came she took it gladly with full hands. Of leisure she made a good use in many ways. Fairly well educated to begin with, and by nature very receptive and intelligent, Amelia had, since her marriage, achieved something very nearly resembling mental culture. Woman-like, she could conceal her weak points cunningly, except where her instinct told her it would be better to confess them openly. She knew a really accomplished man when she met him; even although he might be professing and denying his accomplishment, like Dorian Stepney for instance. Such a man could not be hoodwinked on the things that mattered. Amelia did not try, and her strong points shone all the more brilliantly for her frank admission of shortcomings. Amelia's strong points were not few. She talked charmingly, she followed books and politics with credit, in the affairs of the great world she had been perfected by Elizabeth, Countess of Welshpoole—for a consideration. Lady Welshpoole, widow, but not dowager—Welshpoole was still a schoolboy—had been a very present help to the Golightlys, and they in turn had been a refuge and a strength to her. She had piloted them into places where mere gold was no passport (except in so far as it discharges the pilot's fee), she had been the power behind the throne at Amelia's first important receptions. After one or two of these Mrs. Golightly found she could very well stand alone. She did not, however, throw Elizabeth Welshpoole over; that was not Amelia's way. They remained friends, perfectly good friends, as it happened, and the House of Thlangothlan had need of such; for its acres were very bare. Amelia had the gift

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rare in women of comradeship. It was to that she owed her position as Mrs. P. Golightly.

Mrs. P. it was always. That way sorrow lay. When the *Beacon* had been about two years in the great man's hands, signal service to the Government during an Election (together with the usual donation) brought the offer of a baronetcy. Golightly came beaming into Amelia's boudoir. He twirled a letter in his hands.

"How would you like to be Lady Golightly, Amelia?" he asked, chucking her under the chin.

Amelia flushed very prettily. Then her face fell. Potiphar was reminded of his earliest proposal, and his knees grew liquid.

"What is it they offer?" Amelia asked apprehensively.

"A full-blown baronetcy, my dear, nothing less."

"Wouldn't they run to a barony?"

"Ambitious, eh! Amelia? That may come in time. What, aren't you pleased, my duck?"

"Don't call me 'duck,' Pharie," she trembled on the verge of tears. Potiphar stood confused. Then he saw what Amelia had seen at the first flash.

"Dash and confound my Christian name!" he roared, and hurried from his wife's presence.

No. "Sir Potiphar and Lady Golightly" would not do. The Prime Minister could not see his way to recommend the higher title to her Majesty, for the present at least. Potiphar oiled the Party palm once more, after a decent interval, but before anything could be done the Government fell sudden as Lucifer, and by some mischance he was overlooked in the Resignation Honours. The long reign of the other side began, and it seemed as if the Golightly cards would bear for ever the

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plain inscription Mr. and Mrs. P. That was preferable, however, to the eternal trumpeting of "Sir Potiphar."

The next generation, Amelia reflected sadly, would have healed all that; for the only child had a pretty name. He was born a year after the marriage, before Amelia had become quite emancipated from her "Duchess" period. She never really outgrew it, and her unchastened romanticism was yet to bear, in its recrudescence, strange and somewhat bitter fruit. But of that in its own good time. When her baby came, she was still Amelia Jelks in spirit if not in name. Tender memories of the hero of her best story in "Healthy Tales for Young Ladies" came to her aid at the naming of the child. He should be Osric Reginald Grosvenor. Potiphar had no objections, and certainly no ambitions to transmit what belonged to himself. The grand-paternal Armageddon was equally ineligible. So Osric Reginald Grosvenor the infant was duly named by his godfathers and godmothers, one of the latter being Elizabeth, the impecunious Countess of Welshpoole. And thereupon, as the babe grew, Amelia proceeded with blind affection to spoil him utterly. Then came a time when, with clearer vision of certain nice distinctions, she half regretted the "Grosvenor"; but there, it was no use going back upon that, and it could be sunk in a discreet initial. Had not P. Golightly set the example? The child himself, however, was not to escape. A day was coming when Oxford, with its diabolical mental alertness, was to take note of his initials and make therefrom absurd capital, rechristening the youth "Orgies," a title to which he lived up so completely that his pastors and masters sent him to study *De Re Rustica*

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afar from the learned halls of Isis. But this also is still in the dim future.

The Saturday night, or rather Sunday morning, before he fell asleep, and even after, Dorian Stepney was much occupied with the vision of Amelia. During the years that had passed since he became the vital spark of the *Beacon*, he had seen a great deal socially of the Golightlys. From the day of their first meeting at the Savoy, Mrs. Golightly had smiled discreetly upon Dorian, and gradually the young man had discovered her geuius for comradeship. At first Dorian had not disturbed Amelia's peace. She admired him as an interesting and extremely presentable person, who made a pretty figure at her parties. He was curiously like the portrait of Osric Reginald Grosvenor in the story, but that of course, meant nothing, and she was devoted to Pharie, who, although not good-looking exactly, was very kind and dear. With her own progress in quasi-spiritual things, interwoven as it was with material progress also, Amelia had glimmerings, faint at first and repudiated with hot shame, that Potiphar, for all his worldly veneer, was "well, you know, not quite"—as Elizabeth Welshpoole would have said. The ghost of the "Duchesses" was not exorcised, however; she had in those early day dreamed always of a Paladin, and now, with middle-age at hand, she discovered that something had been left unfulfilled in her life. Her Paladin was to be tall, fair, and gracefully built, his body exercised in the playing-fields, his voice pleasantly modulated, his manner towards women was to be of the right kind, a skilful blending of deference and command. If not a soldier, he was to be a man of affairs, practical and masterful, and he must be young.

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For years the compromise with Pharie had almost blotted out the dream. But one day it returned, when she had reached the very age at which resistance is weakest.

For a time she fought with vain imaginations. Then in an evil day she and Lady Welshpoole went to hear a fashionable lecturer who for a time led captive silly women with his discourses on Platonic love. Amelia, of course, paid for the tickets. Never was money better spent. The way became clear for the indulgence of her dreams. In the rarer atmosphere of philosophy, the hitherto unrealised Amelia Jelks could fulfil herself and yet remain the faithful spouse of P. Golightly. It was all very mysterious, very thrilling, and withal beautiful. And the Paladin, as it happened, could talk of these things with knowledge, for he had, as Amelia Jelks might have said, but Amelia Golightly did *not* say—"the education." Avaunt vulgarity!

At the supper-party Amelia's talk was all of the Professor and his doctrine. It may in spirit have been somewhat reminiscent of Miss Blimber's "Dear Tusculum," as far as Lady Welshpoole was concerned; but Amelia had read the Professor's prescribed smatterings with her usual intelligence, and Dorian, already slightly blinded, played her game charmingly. She continued still to live in a halo of *ci-devant* authorship. The Healthy Tales for young women were decently buried, but it was known that before her marriage Mrs. Golightly had "written novels." She had little time now for that lucrative pastime, but it was whispered that she had had a great work on the stocks for years. This was not altogether a myth. Potiphar cherished the idea with doting affection, and Dorian was called into counsel

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by the author herself. He read the draft, and resolved to suggest elaboration so extensive that the end would remain for ever in abeyance. His cunning almost defeated itself, for Potiphar had a mind to run the story as a serial in the *Beacon*. His ideal of a serial story was one that would go on for ever and for ever. That is the true and only test of success in this department of letters.

"Why not begin it *to-day*?" said Potiphar in private conclave, unconsciously quoting his own advertisements. "Mrs. Golightly can easily keep it up, I know. You say, Dorian, she needs space to do her subject justice. Well, if it takes — I know from old experience it'll take — she can have all the space she wants, for as long as she wants, or, at least, as long as the public may demand it. It'll encourage her to see the beginning in type. Nice amusement for her. She can take it out in frocks. It needn't come on the pay-sheet at all. Why pay fortunes to Clara and George Tusitala?"

"But, my dear sir, even *we* can't forecast the public verdict absolutely. Suppose — remote possibility — it didn't take. Very unpleasant for *us* to call a halt, which, in the interests of the paper, we'd be in duty bound to do."

"Um!" said Potiphar, shooting out his lips, "there's something in that, Dorian. Well, we'll leave it for a bit. Get Clara and George's new thriller out of the way first, and we'll return to Amelia's *magnum opum* later."

Potiphar's one and only Latin phrase, aired in season and out of season, had won him, among the superior young bloods of the office; the nickname of Old Magnum Opum. The young bloods of the *Beacon* were quite alive to the howler, for Dorian Machiavelli had recruited

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the staff with needy but pliable scholars. Once caught and properly tamed, your pliable scholar can brandish the *Beacon* with an effectiveness impossible to Board-school boys. The latter may have the more alert nose, but they have no staying power. The *Beacon's* clever *mélange* appealed to the educated classes as well as to the proletariat. That was Dorian Stepney's supreme triumph.

And now his success in business was enhaloed with the glamour of romance. It came gradually, insidiously; laughed at at first, then regarded with curiosity, then played with as a strange half-speculative experiment, until one day it declared itself as an Emotion. For years he had denied his emotions. Inevitably there came an hour when Emotion sent in the bill. Was he prepared to foot it? Was he expected to foot it? He could not tell. But there it was, and unlike mere bills of merchandise, it could not be torn up and thrust into the waste-paper basket. Waste-paper! He was still enough of the old Dorian to see, and to dislike, the symbol his random thought had suggested.

More than ever, during the Golightly party, he had realised what was threatening him. There had been a time when he had smiled good-humouredly at Amelia's enthusiasms. To-night he discovered something new; a strange jealousy that this superb creature — Amelia's ripened charms called for no other word — should not commit herself. She and Lady Welshpoole were full of the Professor's nonsense. Dorian knew — none better — what arrant nonsense it was. Where he had formerly skirmished in easy half-contemptuous acquiescence, he became serious, he combated, he exposed. Lady Welsh-

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poole soon became bored, but Amelia, resting her pretty hands on the table and sometimes fidgeting with the stem of her wine-glass, leaned forward and listened with her soul in her eyes. The editor of the *Beacon* had become another, perhaps a better, man. Amelia had never heard anyone talk just like this. She may not have understood it all, but she was impressed. There is a type of woman that worships intellectual accomplishment, the extent or deficiency of which it is unable to gauge. Amelia Golightly represented that type in its fullest flower. And as she listened to what, after all, were mere superficialities (for Dorian had no need of more at the moment), she began subconsciously to draw contrasts. This was something to which she had not been accustomed. Well, that couldn't be helped, and she didn't quarrel with her fate. But it would be nice if little Osric could be trained to grow up as clever a man as — his father. Yes, certainly his father was a very able man. Look at Golightly's! She smiled across the table at Pharie, who was giving Lady Welshpoole sound advice about an investment. He smiled back at his wife with a rather glazed eye, and poured himself another glass of champagne. As years went on, the good things of this life were coming to mean more and more to Potiphar Golightly. There had not been flagrant excess, but there had been warnings from an eminent specialist.

Mrs. Golightly darted a telegraphic glance from Potiphar's eye to the champagne. He understood, sighed and pushed the glass away.

Dorian saw the movement, and hated himself for the suggestion that flitted like an obscene bat through some remote region of consciousness. It was a dim vision of

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a Possibility, a Menace, and beyond, a Cleared Road.

He thrust it from him. One wasn't to blame for one's thoughts, even the least engaging. His throat had gone dry. He sipped a few drops of wine, and returned to Amelia, who was regretting that it was time to go.

Yes, she was a jolly woman; the best chum in the world.

And where the devil was the harm in that?

He asked himself the question again as he put Amelia's cloak about her beautiful shoulders.

CHAPTER V

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IT has been hinted that if Dorian had known the preoccupations of Mr. James Alexander Hay, better known as Punchie, on that memorable evening, his slumbers would have been less pleasant than they were. But the favourable reply to the telegram of commission revealed only a long-suffering Punchie, ready and willing to turn his hand to anything for the sake of chance guineas; a creature insensible to rebuffs, prepared to be used at the shortest notice by any taskmaster, and then forgotten, until the next opportunity arose of employing his genius.

Genius it was undeniably, perverted and misused, but still genius. In that strange little body, ever so slightly deformed, dwelt a fiery spirit, warped now by misfortune and the consciousness of servitude to baser ends, when the higher, in happier circumstances, would have been its real vocation. Long ago, with a cynical laugh, Punchie had seen himself summed up in the line, *Video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor*. And now the following of the worse cause had become second nature. He seldom gave the better cause a glance. Bitterness had eaten out the finer and kindlier humanities. He could still be gracious when it served his purpose or where he loved, but for the most part he had grown waspish. In compensation for a stunted body, ironical Nature had given

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him a beautiful face and still more beautiful eyes, brown and liquid, that in softer moments declared the genius behind the drudge. But few saw that revelation; for Punchie turned to the world eyes hardened by distrust and disappointment, eyes sharpened by cunning begotten of the struggle for bare existence, eyes made sinister by long nursing of rancour and revenge. He was one of the failures of whom Mr. Ray Seneschal had thought on the day of his struggle with Dorian. He had come up to Craven a dreamy delicate boy, already exquisitely accomplished in humane learning. But he never did himself justice in the Schools. He was too desultory; he could not pin himself down to routine. He was for ever going off at a tangent on some private study, and so he took a degree that was good certainly, but not good enough. He sat for a Fellowship, but the old perversity betrayed him once more, and he was beaten by a man who had not a tithe of his knowledge or ability, but who had had the worldly wisdom to specialise in an age of specialism. Embittered, Hay fled to London, where he picked up a living among the sparrows of Fleet Street. Gradually he lost touch with Mr. Ray Seneschal's world. Daily bread was the first necessity. To get it he had to do things that were anathema. His gorge rose at first, but custom blunted sensibility; the growth of cynicism as he watched his own *decrecendo* at last helped him to glory in his shame. It amused him to watch his own ape-like versatility.

One day inevitable revulsion came, and he longed to return to a more purely intellectual world. He thought he saw a chance. But it was too late. He had been too long out of the running. Such things were given nowa-

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days only to men who had faithfully pursued one object, who had kept themselves in touch. He found generous support from friends, but the wisest of them warned him that it was a forlorn hope. He was an outsider, if not an outcast; he had lent himself to pursuits that did not inspire confidence in his abilities. Punchie reflected on the bald wisdom of his friend's counsel and saw himself in his true colours. No, it was a wild effort, a grotesque attempt to sit on two stools. He must accept the inevitable and stick to his last. This midsummer madness would do him no good, here or there. It was the inevitable Nemesis of his failure to specialise, in an age of specialism. He was branded for ever; what could the potent, grave, and reverend signiors have to say to the inconsiderable miscellaneous scribbler? He withdrew his candidature, and vowed to look back no more. There was a game to be played here. He would play it. Hitherto he had not given cunning a chance. Thus far he had been clean. But he knew very well that nature had made him subtle. If he set his wits to work in the right way he might snatch something for himself out of the welter. Some men lived by their brains; others lived by manipulating the brains of their less fortunate fellows. The latter course was the more profitable, rightly managed. As yet he had had no chance of playing the middleman's game. But he would watch. And with the resolve Punchie took the first easy step towards Avernus.

The way came through the worst misfortune he had yet known. When Mr. Potiphar Golightly flung the old staff of the *Beacon* into the gutter, evil days descended upon Punchie. He had just happened to suit the old

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Beacon in a particular department. But the times were changing rapidly; and James Alexander could not find another salaried appointment, although he knocked at many doors. He rubbed along with chance nondescript writings; for he had learned how to earn a little bitter bread in that way, but it was a heart-breaking struggle. About one-tenth of his actual weekly toil resulted in definite income. The rest was waste. To make matters worse, the comparative security of the *Beacon* had lured him into the cardinal error of matrimony. People had told Barbara Celarent that she was a fool, but she saw only the better soul of Punchie in his eyes, and to his oddity of figure she paid no heed. For her he unlocked all the treasures of his wonderful intellect, his shy, quaint fancies, his inimitable drollery, his extraordinary knowledge. Barbara had come to know him when she was at St. Hilda's College for Women and he was at Craven. Afterwards she too came to London, where she worked in connection with some women's movement or other. They had enjoyed their idyll of Bloomsbury, and at length, when J. A. seemed to be settled on the *Beacon*, they clubbed forces and set up a little flat near the British Museum. In the years that had passed since Punchie's dismissal, it had been increasingly difficult to keep the flat going, but Barbara had not given up her own work when they married. There had been no babies, fortunately, and in spite of terrible anxieties and J. A.'s continual discouragements and disappointments, love had not flown out at the window. But although the idyll was not dead, Barbara suffered in secret. Jim was not changed to her, but somehow she knew that there was a change in him that boded no good. To the world

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he had always been airily cynical; now he seemed to have let rancour take hold of him. She tried to combat it where she could, but he seldom gave her an opening. She fancied he was nursing something of which he would not speak frankly to his wife. Then one day he seemed to recover a shadow of his old lightness of manner. It was not, as far as she knew, that luck had turned. Oh, if it only would; for there were new complications to be faced. Barbara, too, had her secret. "Advanced" woman though she was, she looked forward to an event, not far distant now, with tremulous joy, not untouched with self-reproach; for — here the advanced woman reasserted herself — with their means, or rather lack of means, it was criminal.

Barbara was alone in their little sitting-room when Stepney's telegram came. She was nursing a rather cheerless fire and thinking the strange thoughts that come to every woman in her condition, thoughts of life and death, a strange medley of cowardice and heroism. It was an unpleasant evening, wet and squally; mocking winds assailed the four corners of the barrack-mansions high up in which their flat was perched in a sort of eyrie. The telegraph boy's knock startled her out of her dreams. Every such knock was welcome; it usually meant work. The postman was a more mixed blessing. He, too, brought work, sometimes; but he also delivered "declined with thanks," a weary tale of lost endeavours to hit the nail on the head.

Barbara read the telegram, took out her fountain-pen, and holding the form against the wall, scribbled the reply. Then she went back to the sitting-room and passed into the bedroom beyond. In a few

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minutes she reappeared ready to go out. She might have telegraphed to Jim that he was wanted, but every sixpence counted. It had been a bad week. She took out her purse, looked in, and gave a little pout of annoyance. Lucky she had not written her telegram and then found she had nothing to give the grinning boy. She had insisted on giving Jim all her available change to-night. He had an important meeting with men who might be useful. One never knew what might be necessary for a man meeting other men, and the poor boy ought not to be caught short. Demurring, and only after the assurance that there would be nothing wanted to-night, Punchie took the subsidy, and went to keep his appointment at the Alcides Club. Barbara knew she had better get hold of him at once, for time was very short. Dorian wanted his "copy" by six on Sunday night. There were subjects on which she could very well go ahead herself, collecting material for her husband, getting down the right books, marking passages and references. She was invaluable for such help; but Dorian's commission was somewhat out of the way. She knew Jim knew all about the subject, but to her it was a sealed book. He must be warned, for if he stayed out too late, he would not be in his best form to-morrow. He must keep in with Stepney. She pulled back the blind and looked out at the dashing rain. A horrid night and a longish walk! and she hadn't even a bus fare. However, there was nothing for it. She shivered, banked up the fire, turned off the light, and went down the gusty staircase of the mansions, out into the streets. The chilly damp caught her shrewdly; for she and James had not dined over brilliantly.

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Almost at the same moment Amelia Golightly drove forth, fur-enwrapped and foot-warmed, to taste the fleshpots of the Carlovingian Restaurant, to savour also the intellectual and physical charm of Mr. Dorian Stepney, whose abilities contributed, in their degree, to the maintenance of Carlovingian and kindred luxury.

Punchie had told Barbara the names of the men he was to meet at the Alcides. He had not been asked to dine, but to come along about ten o'clock. Knowing the Alcides, he had dressed. In evening clothes, the little man looked almost distinguished. His splendid forehead and his brilliant eyes told against the garment of ceremony. One forgot the slight deformity. It was a strange, elusive thing, no one could tell exactly where it lay. To Barbara's slightly decadent mind it had been a subtle attraction. She was peculiarly susceptible to this; for she alone had seen the full possibility of beauty in Punchie's soul. The contrast, so piquant in its distortion, had aroused in her emotions which she would not have dared to confess. They were both, more or less, Florentines of the Quattrocento; both were skilled in the learning of that perverse period, which brought them, in rare moments of freedom, strange dreams of things ineffable. She used to say that J. A. should have belonged to the court of Lorenzo the Magnificent, who would have found the right work for him.

Punchie smiled at the fancy and the paradox it suggested. For these two, who had to be so extremely "up-to-date" in order to live, were yet at heart hopelessly out of date. However, such dreams had to be kept for very rare and special occasions. The world and the Dorian Stepneys that fed them intermittently had no

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need of back numbers. Barbara too laughed at herself; for the time had been when she, in the new enthusiasm of Feminism, had prided herself on being, if anything, a little in advance of the times. And all the while she had been hugging a vision of Renaissance Italy. Her very dress declared it, a straight-cut brown Florentine robe, now much the worse for wear. It was some time since she had been able to afford new clothes. No matter, to her husband and her friends she was always beautiful. But her beauty, like Punchie's, was chiefly of the eyes. And such eyes, always the battleground of a struggle between mirth and melancholy, humorous, a little sly and secret, perhaps, but that only made them the more adorable. Intellectual, Barbara never thrust her intellectuality upon people; because perhaps she was also emotional almost to sensuality. She gave one the impression of a bundle of complexities passing human skill to unravel. It was sufficient pastime, for most, to watch their interplay of contradiction. Most piquant of all was the firm hand she kept on her emotionalism. Hardly anyone but her husband knew that she could be tender.

To him the discovery came strangely in the early days of their acquaintance. They were together in town during a Long Vacation, and Barbara had lunched with him at his hotel. Afterwards, as they sat in the lounge over their coffee, some children passed along. They stopped and looked at Barbara, attracted at first perhaps by her rather unusual dress. But a second look brought them by some magic to her knee. She did not say a word, but her face was transfigured. Her lips moved, she seemed to tremble on the verge of tears,

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she caught her breath sharply, and then it seemed to J. A. that she grew to a softer, almost a Madonna-like graciousness of presence. In the children's eyes was recognition of an ideal playmate, one to whom Goblinland and Elfland had revealed all their mysteries, one who could charm them with tales no ordinary grown-up could possibly understand. But still no word was spoken; it was as if Barbara dared not trust herself to speak, so poignant was the maternal emotion; and at last the children, reproved by a bustling mother, were captured and carried off, still regretfully looking back at their fairy princess, whose eyes had said so much although her lips were silent. J. A. looked on and wondered. Already he loved her. From that moment his love turned to worship.

That worship, a thing infinitely pure and exalting in itself, was now, by the irony that beset his life, spurring Punchie to the indulgence of a baser passion. From the day when he was discharged from the *Beacon* he had kept watch for some opportunity to be revenged on Golightly. At first his resentment was vague, and saw little hope of fulfilment. Had he fallen, like many of the other Outcasts, into regular employment again, he would probably have let the feeling die. But every new year of bad luck saw the renewal of his vow, and at last the thing took definite shape in his mind. It seemed chimerical, but he told himself that everything came to him who knew how to wait. He waited accordingly, and hunger, that persuades to evil, sharpened his wits. One day he was amazed to realise the magnitude of his scheme, contrasted with his own impotence. But the impotence was an accident. Get over that, and

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the sinews of war would be in his hands. His brains, he knew, would do the rest. And then, let Golightly look to himself!

He had never forgotten the first exploit of Dorian's editorship. On that he built his hopes. But, alas! he did not know Sir Bradford Stingo, nor did he see any clear way of approaching him. No doubt the great man bore the *Beacon* a grudge for the affair of the Copper Concessions, but it would not do to assume that he did. To go to him with proposals would be crude folly. Very likely, if he did get an interview, he would be shown the door, *sans phrase*. There was nothing for it but to await the fullness of time. And the fullness of time brought Solomon Rheingold.

Let not the name conjure up any vision of an obese, flat-footed, too amply fed, bejewelled, ringleted, swarthy, sensual, and racially lisping Englishman, drawn from a Drury Lane autumn drama. "Das Rheingold," as his friends called him, was none of these. His name was unfortunate, even inappropriate, except in so far as it suggested deep worldly wisdom — perhaps even, on occasion, heavenly wisdom that is better than rubies — and fabulous wealth. These Solomon possessed, but he kept them in their own place, as became an English gentleman. If he was crafty, no one ever found that out until it was too late to say anything about it — one would have looked such a fool, then — if he was wealthy, he avoided display. Still on the right side of middle age, elegant in figure and engaging in manner, Rheingold was a man to know, and known he was accordingly. He trusted his valet wholly; for he knew that otherwise he must go wrong with the colour of his tie; it was

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an old family failing of the Rheingolds to go wrong with their ties. That he spent part of the day in the City did not make him less of a scholar and numismatologist, and to these accomplishments he added a really exquisite taste in music. People flocked to his evenings to hear his prima donnas, and to look with equal lack of understanding at his famous collection of coins.

Those coins and a chance advertisement brought Punchie Hay into the sphere of Solomon's influence. The coins required a custodian, someone who would devote to them a few hours a week, "without hindrance to present employment." Punchie applied. Solomon saw at once that here was his man. But would such erudition be content with the trifle that Solomon could afford to pay? He dissembled his doubt, and casually named his terms. Erudition in need was pleased to accept. Every Tuesday and Friday afternoon found Punchie at the Rheingold mansion caring for the coins, and incidentally writing, without further emolument and for pure joy in the subject, a magnificent *catalogue raisonné*. A tender smile wreathed Solomon's delicate, almost ascetic, aquiline features, as he watched the growth of the work. Punchie, however, was not such a fool as Solomon supposed.

Gradually employer and employed, drawn together by this common interest in Numismatology, or the "Science of Collecting Coins" (the translation is all wrong etymologically, but of a painful accuracy in other respects) — gradually, we say, employer and employed grew intimate. First Solomon took to coming home early on Tuesdays, in order to watch Punchie work and have a chat about his hobby; then he extended the

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condescension to Fridays also. And one day he mentioned casually that he had got a certain coin from Stingo, who had picked it up, ignorantly, in the Levant.

Punchie, docketing an entry, finished it unmoved. Then he looked up.

"Stingo," he echoed, "Sir Bradford Stingo?"

"The same," Solomon replied. "He's given me several beauties; that Daric with the kneeling archer is another of his little remembrances."

"By the way, Mr. Rheingold, we ought to have the giver's name recorded on all the labels, in the case of coins presented, oughtn't we? We have full records of purchase and prices."

"Please yourself," Solomon replied with a shrug. "Have a cigarette."

Punchie chose one, lighted it, and blew a long whiff. "That was a nasty knock the *Beacon* gave Sir Bradford," he remarked, "just when the paper changed hands."

"It gave more people than Stingo a knock, my dear Hay, but I must say it was cleverly done. Stingo fails to see the cleverness, and will curse Golightly to his dying day, and probably after, if they happen to meet again, which I consider not improbable."

"I did not know," said Punchie quietly, "that railing accusations were permitted among the angels."

Solomon's laugh, low and rippling, but not altogether melodious, gave one the impression of a performance by a well-trained animal. As a good Christian, he had caught the New Testament allusion.

"Anyhow," he remarked, as his laughter died away, "on this side eternity Stingo's got his knife in Golightly, and for the matter of that, he's not singular."

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Punchie blew another meditative whiff and returned to his docketing. He had made a note, however, apart from the catalogue. He let the note bear fruit gradually, never forcing the growth, but watering his plant with judicious care. And at last a tender slip was surely grafted on Solomon, and this in due time bore fruit also. The result was the conference between Stingo, Rheingold, and Hay at the Alcides Club.

In a private room the two financiers sat over their cigars and listened cautiously while Punchie expounded his scheme. He was an excellent advocate, and little by little his words awoke real interest in the two men of means. They watched in fancy the tempest of Nemesis form, no bigger than a man's hand, on the horizon, and sweep up to overwhelm the House of Golightly and all its works. No detail was lacking; they saw that they had to deal, in this insignificant body, with a master.

But still Stingo fenced.

"You think you can do it?" he asked.

"I know the ropes," Punchie replied curtly. "I've got the brains. All I need is the money, plenty of it, and for a sufficient time, but it'll all come back again, every penny."

"We'd expect a profit, however," Solomon suggested in his gentle voice.

"That too," said Punchie, "I can promise you."

A waiter entered as he spoke. "A lady wishes to see your guest for a moment, sir," he said to Rheingold. "Mrs. Hay, the name is," he added, turning to Punchie.

Amazed, Punchie made his excuses and went downstairs.

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"Good heavens, Babs," he exclaimed, "what's wrong, dear?"

"Nothing; but Stepney wants something in a hurry." She held out the telegram. "I wanted you to come home before twelve and get a good sleep before you tackled it."

"All right," Punchie replied, reading the message and crushing it into his pocket. "Confound Stepney and his rushes. Thank you, little woman, for letting me know. But, my dear, you look awfully white—oh, I say, don't tell me you've walked all the way here, and in such weather?"

"It's not so bad," Barbara protested, putting him off with a smile, and turning towards the door, "Come home soon."

"Look here," Punchie objected, looking anxiously at his wife, "you're not going back alone. I'll run up and say good night to my friends and take you home in a cab."

"But have you quite finished your business?"

"Near enough. The rest will keep." He ran upstairs. The hall porter gave Barbara a chair. She took it wearily.

Her husband reappeared hatted and coated. The commissionaire called a hansom. Punchie helped Barbara in tenderly.

"Dear little wife," he said, pressing her hand as he took his place beside her.

"This is hopeless extravagance," Barbara laughed, leaning back on the cushions. "It really doesn't run to cabs, you know."

"To-night it does," Punchie replied cheerfully;

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"and perhaps to-morrow night too, and the night after, and so on *in saecula saeculorum*."

"Is it luck at last?" Barbara asked, rousing herself.

"Perhaps."

They said no more until they reached the flat. Punchie thought Barbara would never climb the long stair. He cursed his lack of physique. The man she deserved to have would have carried her up like a feather.

Ten minutes later he had summoned a neighbour, and was racing hatless through the rain in search of a doctor.

For the first time on record, Punchie Hay, the ever-ready henchman of letters, failed Mr. Dorian Stepney. The article that had cost Barbara her life was never written.

About the hour that Stepney went to press without it, Punchie sat in his little book-lined workroom gazing at desolation. But he was not altogether alone in the world. He had still an incentive to work, to scheme, to plot, perhaps to conquer; for from the adjoining room a feeble cry reminded him of Barbara's legacy.

But the tenderness that stole into his wonderful eyes for a moment was extinguished at the recurrent realisation of his loss. His agony found voice, and with new hatred he cursed the House of Golightly.

CHAPTER VI

MOTIVES AND CUES

WHEN Stepney heard of Punchie's bereavement, he had a moment of real distress. That hard world, it has been hinted, is yet a place of the kindest comradeships. Where business is concerned, men may be flinty, overbearing, careless of everything except the machine they serve; but for the brother in trouble there is real feeling and a ready hand to help. Dorian had known Mrs. Hay slightly when she was Barbara Celarent — the prettiest figure in logic, men had called her — he knew from hearsay what she had been to her husband.

"Poor Punchie!" he sighed. Then he wrote a very tactful note of condolence quite in the best manner of old Dorian of Craven. At the end he conveyed a delicate hint that if he could be of any use at this trying time, etc.

Punchie took the implied kindness without an explosion. He knew quite well that Dorian meant it, and he did not allow himself to dwell on the irony of it all. He returned thanks in proper form for kind sympathy; that phrase included the offer of assistance. But it bit into his soul, nevertheless, that the man who, indirectly and so far innocently, had caused his wife's death, should have offered the wherewithal to bury her. Providentially he was not driven to seek such aid. And yet, but for a lucky turn of the wheel, he might have had no choice. But Rheingold, delicately antedating the great

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compact, set Punchie's mind at rest. As the servant of the new company he took, without compunction and with assured independence, an advance of salary, wherewith he could do his immediate duty by the living and the dead.

Then, facing the world with a new antagonism, an Ishmaelite declared, his hand against every man, except those who would serve his purpose for the moment, he sought relief in work. Penury had passed at one stroke, too late to be of use to Barbara, but there was the child. In that frail atom palpitated hopes and fears that alone kept her father from irredeemable hardness. But outside that little life he had no pity for anything in the world. Very early in the days of his loneliness, he had one flash of self-revelation that appalled him. He had not guessed that perverse human nature held such depths. Up from the abyss arose an assailing consciousness of satisfaction, almost of joy, that Barbara's departure had left him free for certain unscrupulous and cynical projects, from which she would certainly have held him back. The thought was sacrilege, and he recoiled from it at first in horror. For Barbara's sake he would leave those methods untried. Yet why? He had become a social filibusterer, who must succeed or perish. For the child's sake, he must not perish. His scheme must be wrought out to the last and finest detail, if Golightly's was to be overwhelmed. Rheingold and Stingo did not pay him for half measures. He had not told them everything just yet, but he must hold back nothing, when the time came, that would serve their end. So he took the field, secretly, and drove his first sap. It would be a long business, involving much underground

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work, perhaps a year or two of preparation before the campaign could open publicly, for the citadel he had set himself to take was strong. Not impregnable, however, if wits and money were rightly used.

Rheingold and Stingo, once convinced of their man, behaved like sportsmen. Punchie wanted for nothing. His personal comfort, which meant a great deal to him, was considered, and he went to work in handsome, even charming surroundings. Solomon, as it happened, had a set of chambers near the Embankment, with a wonderful view of the river. The rooms were just in the right place, central, yet retired enough to be unsuspecting. They had once been useful to him for some purpose which does not concern us here, but latterly he had let them. He bought out his tenant, however, and in due time Mr. J. A. Hay's name appeared on an unobtrusive brass plate. Thither Punchie came every morning from the country, whither he had removed for the sake of his little girl, and there he planned, wrote, interviewed, took counsel with his chiefs, and gradually began to build up a great fabric. So cleverly did he contrive, that no breath of what he was about reached the air of the Strand and Fleet Street. He was by way of being a literary and artistic agent, one of the many smaller fry of that sort, who start, struggle for a time and disappear before the one (or is it two or half a dozen?) great and efficient forces in that department. His discreet circular went only where he had ulterior designs. But chance inevitably brought into his net some obscure new talent, which he marked down for future use. He managed to do just enough actual business to appease his clients. His friends, when they heard of the literary agency, shrugged their

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shoulders and remarked in various keys, "Poor Punchie!" "Who d'ye think's behind him?" "Can't last," and so on. Then they forgot all about him, for London is a very busy place. The experienced, chancing upon a client, asked genially, "Planted any stuff for you yet?" If the answer was "yes," the experienced exclaimed, "*Good* man!" If "no," it was, "Fear *he's* no good; take my advice, my boy, and go to the one and only. He'll touch you off in style." And therewith the experienced invited the client to have a drink, for luck, and straightway he too thought no more of the matter.

But all the while Punchie was laying up powder and shot. And as he toiled, new developments, arose in his busy brain. Every morning he entered his office with a sheaf of the Golightly publications (among others) under his arm. He bought them casually as he came along — there was nothing in that — and studied them diligently, taking hints where hints were given, noting what could be improved, what should be avoided. Potiphar little knew what talent he had flung out of the *Beacon* office in Punchie Hay. Stepney, for all his versatility, was a fool to this. The papers, marked and indexed, were filed by Punchie's one clerk, a silent young man transferred circuitously from the Rheingold office in the City. Durfey was perfectly safe, for he had a past. Once upon a time he had been detected in great pecuniary iniquity; but Solomon, like the Christian gentleman he was, had given him another chance, when he came out. Durfey could not return to the City house, of course, with the brand of Pentonville upon him, but the Embankment was another matter. So to the Embankment he went, with grateful humility, prepared to end his days there,

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if need were. Need was; for no other door would ever open to Tom Durfey, except the Door of Death. He had learned, although he had never heard the classic pun, that the business of a secretary is to be secret. Punchie kept Tom's willing nose at the grindstone, and reported favourably upon his behaviour to Solomon. In time he came to like Durfey, who had a queer humour of his own. Prison had come near to kill it, but the quaint pungent wit of his new master, who, though firm, was not harsh, gradually filliped it out into the light again. Both Hay and Durfey had one up against the world. It gave them a common meeting-place.

Durfey was an excellent Cerberus, and saved his chief much valuable time by his insight into men and matters.

"Whom have we now, O true Thomas?" Punchie asked, lifting a preoccupied eye, one day when a visitor was announced. "And what pills does he offer to purge melancholy?"

Unmoved, the watchdog, who understood the allusion well enough, for Punchie had shown him the works of another and a greater Tom D'Urfey, replied:

"Soft-hatted, woolly-looking chap, Sir, no chin; small portmanteau full of poetry."

"Has he letters of recommendation from the poet Laureate, the Archbishop of Canterbury, or the Bishop of London?"

"No, sir."

"Then, Thomas, I fear — I regret — I am unable — you understand, Thomas, unable — grieved, cut to the heart; but the market is so limited — it would not pay us, Thomas, to 'handle' the priceless wares — a drug, Thomas, a drug."

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Thomas did what was necessary, and for the future dismissed druggists on his own responsibility.

But one day he offered another.

"Did I not tell you, Thomas?" Punchie began impatiently.

"But, sir, this gentleman says he's a specialist. You said you wished to see specialists."

"Ah! very true! and in what, Thomas, does he specialise?"

"In hymns, sir."

Punchie did not smile. "Show him in," he said, falling abruptly into his most business-like manner.

And so the good work went on apace. Before he became quite engrossed in it, Punchie enjoyed a sardonic little joke. Dorian, ignorant of poor old Hay's regular employment, sent him one or two commissions. He did the work punctually and well, and pocketed the guineas with a grotesque satisfaction. Then he wrote Dorian a little note, saying he had found a billet that prevented his doing outside work. Dorian was too busy to inquire what the billet might be. He had once or twice thought of squeezing Punchie on to the staff of the *Beacon* again, but that was difficult. Well, it was good the poor little chap had found a job at last! Thenceforward, he thought no more about him. They never happened to meet. Their next communication was to be of a kind that not even the intelligence of a Stepney could anticipate, so capricious is the whirligig of that mad-merry-melancholy-cruel-kindly gamble men call journalism, where you are up to-day and down to-morrow, and with luck up again the day after that. But if you have no luck, well, you can hop about among the sparrows and

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drink with them on sunny, idle, threadbare days at the Temple Fountain, or, when a penny is handy, round the corner at the Devereux Arms.

And Potiphar, the unconsciously assailed, sat, on a rare evening of leisure, in his West End mansion, taking satisfactory stock of his life-work. Comfortably dined and wined, he surveyed the great fabric he had created, and behold it was all very good. He had dealt squarely with men, had paid on the nail — as little as possible, but that was business — and had, as he said, with a homely metaphor reminiscent of far-off Marsh-by-the-Pound, driven his pigs to the best market. He had nothing wherewith to reproach himself. A single slip of his youth had been properly atoned for, in hard cash, and for the rest, there had been Amelia. To her he had been ever faithful. To-night he thought, as he had not done for years, of that far-off error of young blood. For a time it had been a severe tax; manfully met, but when affluence came in like a flood he had done the handsome thing. That was when the boy was about fourteen. He had never cared to see him, he did not even remember what name he went by. Poor Gracie he knew died long ago. In the early days of his prosperity he consulted the great solicitor his growing business required him to employ. That man of affairs had made all arrangements. A sum sufficient for a good, even a first-rate, start was set aside. "And please don't let me hear any more of the matter," he added: for now Amelia had crowned his life, and he desired no distractions. The man of law obeyed, and the matter had all but passed out of Potiphar's remembrance.

It had come back to-night, he supposed, because at

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dinner-time he and Amelia had seriously discussed Osric. The boy was twelve now, and hitherto his education, such as it was, had been mismanaged by a succession of tutors. Amelia would not have him sent to school: he was too sensitive, too delicate. It was the only question on which Potiphar and his wife were not in complete harmony. But, as usual, Amelia had had her way. Now, however, even Potiphar saw that the affair was growing serious. He wanted his boy to be a man, one day, a man fitted to take an iron grip of the helm down yonder at the office, and Osric, with his petulant pretty face, his disgraceful temper, his utter ignorance of discipline, gave small promise of any such growth. When the boy was born, Amelia, who had heard that it was the right thing for people in their position to do, had seen that his father put his name down for a great, a distinguished school. It thrilled her at the time, but as the years drew on she liked the idea less and less. Of a preparatory school she would not hear. They could afford the best tutors: she must keep her boy under her own influence — Potiphar, unusually independent, had spoken of apron strings. Amelia wept, and he changed the subject. Very soon now, it would be time for him to go up. Amelia trembled for the apple of her eye, so soon to be cast to the buffeting of an unknown sea. Only this evening when his father jocosely mentioned the matter at dessert, Osric had made a scene. He had his mother's passion for stories, her abhorrence of physical suffering, even of mere discomfort. He had read tales of school-life, and he knew that boys could and did inflict pain on each other. The idea of school had become a horror to him. He trusted that if he rebelled vehemently enough, his mother would

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get her own way. To-night, as they dined alone, Amelia and Potiphar had come nearer to an acute difference than they had ever done in their life. But Golightly saw the fate of Golightly's at stake. That consideration overruled mere domestic ease. He was determined, he told himself, to put a stop to this nonsense now. Osric must learn to be a man. The little world of school was essential with its disciplines, the most useful not pedagogic, to teach the boy how to deal with his fellows. He knew what he had learned even at the village school of Marsh-by-the-Pound.

Potiphar's cigar was nearly at an end, when Amelia, large and Juno-like, her charms accentuated by her evening gown, came in and sat down beside her husband. She had been crying, Potiphar saw with horrible dread; for when Amelia cried, he was done for.

"The child is asleep at last," she said, "but he has been almost wild with nervous dread. Don't you think, Pharie dear, he's too tender, too sensitive, to rough it at a public school? He's getting on quite nicely at home, why not let things be as they are."

"Fudge!" said Potiphar, lighting a fresh cigar.

Amelia looked at her husband with frightened eyes, in which there was a new hint of tears. Pharie had never been brutally abrupt to her before. She tried to speak, but Potiphar took the lead.

"You know, my dear girl, that boy's got to fill a big position one day, a position in which he'll have to manage men, to rule them with an iron hand, to act without fear or favour, without sentiment. I haven't built up Golightly's on tinpot weakness, I haven't made the House to see it made ducks and drakes of by a weakling when I

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retire, as I hope to do before I'm 'tore out'—he reverted to a homely phrase of Marsh-by-the-Pound—“yes, I mean to slip out, Ameliar, and then you and I will have the time of our lives. We're going round the world, my dear, on a long second honeymoon, some day.” Potiphar stroked her hand. She drew it away.

“But,” she objected, “I don't know that Osric's suited for business. If he isn't, it would be worse to force him into it, than to let him alone. We're well enough off to let the boy have a good time. Why should he have to work?”

“His father worked before him, Amelia, and is working still. I don't want to think I've begotten a loafer. Without employment, that boy will go to the devil.”

“Oh, hush, Pharie. But there are other employments. He's very clever. I'd like to see him in the diplomatic service. It's so distinguished.”

Potiphar laughed, Amelia thought, a little coarsely. “My dear girl, the diplomatic service isn't *in* it with our business. Oh, if it's diplomacy you want, let him come down to the office. He'll see it there, and need to use it too. Where d'ye think we'd 'a been, if I hadn't been a diplomat?” Potiphar thumped his chest. He seemed to swell visibly. Amelia had a vision of a vulgar Juggernaut.

“But you have a splendid lieutenant, Pharie; think of Mr. Stepney.”

“Stepney's all right, but a servant isn't a son. And by the same token, Amelia, look at the training Stepney's had: public school boy 'Varsity man. Wish I'd had it. Stepney's given Golightly's a *tone*. None knows it bet-

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ter than myself; but I want the *family* to supply the tone, later on.

"Look here, my dear," the diplomat Potiphar pursued, "you have a talk with Stepney about school and college. He'll tell you what fine places they are. A bit hard, perhaps, for the molly-coddle, but Osric's not to be a molly-coddle. You don't want him to be a molly-coddle, do you, Amelia?"

"*Certainly* not!"

Amelia had forgotten her tears. She was occupied with visions of Stepney, who had so many manly and social graces that she should like to see Osric acquire. Poor Potiphar, what a pity his boyhood had been so — what it was. She avoided exact definition, and looked forward to her talk with Dorian, the man who knew.

"Give me a kiss, Amelia," said Potiphar expansively, with an amorous glance at his wife's charms. It was the hour when the good things of this life wrought potently on his humanity. "We'll make a man o' that lad o' ours yet, no fear."

Conscious of a new repulsion, which she would not acknowledge to herself, Amelia did her duty as a wife. In the act, she realised that the heat of their discussion during dinner had made her careless of the eminent specialist's warning. Pharie had profited by her pre-occupation to ignore his nightly limit. She trembled at his rising jocosity, and shrank from his hot, fat, familiar hands.

She was just about to plead headache and go away, when a servant entered with a telegram.

Golightly read it and looked up, sobered.

"What is it?" Amelia asked.

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"Poor old Adderley," Potiphar replied. "Heart failure. He's been going down hill for a while back. Well, well."

"Oh, poor Kitty!" Amelia exclaimed, rising and going to the writing-table. "Too late for a telegram to be delivered at Thames Ditton. I must send her a note at once."

"Do, dear. Yes, I fear it's bad for Kitty. She won't be very well left. Hiram was a fool to let me buy him out. But he never could resist the sight of money down. I put the cheque under his nose, one day, after lunch. That did the trick. He was a little cheesemonger to the end."

Amelia looked up from her writing. "But he got a *handsome* price, Pharie."

"Yes, and he didn't invest it very well. He was getting old, you see, and without *me* at his back, he wasn't much use, in big things. He went into the Metropolis and World concern, on his own."

"It didn't all go there, of course? There's been no apparent difference in their circumstances, Pharie."

"Nearly all. For the rest, and for their keeping up of appearances, well, Golightly's saw to that. We couldn't let him appear a beggar; but the old man died heavily in debt to the House. It's secured, of course, on the residue of his real estate that escaped the M. and W. smash, but when Golightly's is paid up, I fear Kitty won't have very much left, poor girl."

"We must do something for her, Pharie," Mrs. Golightly said, ringing the bell.

The entrance of a servant saved Potiphar from a direct reply. Amelia gave orders for her letter to be sent at once by district messenger. When the man had left

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the room, Golightly rose, yawned and stretched himself. "Poor old Hiram," he sighed, "he was a good sort. Well, it's the road we've all to go, one day. And he enjoyed himself until latterly. It's very late. Let's go to bed, Amelia."

On the way, they entered a pretty room and looked, affectionately, but with very different ideals, at the sleeping boy, "who was to be made a man of, one day."

CHAPTER VII

KITTY

KITTY ADDERLEY was just turned twenty when her father died. Her mother had not lived into the period of great prosperity, and Kitty had only a dim remembrance of Upper Holloway. Hiram's ambition had been to make her a lady, and in that he had enjoyed the invaluable advice of Mrs. Golightly. The two families, it has been noted, went widely different ways, for Hiram never sought society, with the capital letter. But they remained cordial, and exchanged occasional visits. Hiram, it is true, was not a prominent figure at Mrs. Golightly's receptions, which were little to his taste, but he came to quiet dinners, and talked about his daughter afterwards with his hostess.

Kitty was sent to an excellent school, and afterwards to the Continent. When she came home to Thames Ditton "finished," as Hiram said proudly, Mrs. Golightly engaged a companion for her, and Kitty set herself strenuously to enjoy life. She had plenty of friends among their up-river circle, she played a good game at tennis, sculled and punted, and was accounted a belle at local dances. But her thoughts were ever set Londonwards; she longed for something more than a life that was neither altogether suburban nor altogether country. Most of all, her interest was music and the stage. Nearly

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every Wednesday and Saturday afternoon found her in town at a *matinée*. Her room was crowded with photographs, and for the musician or actor who was *bel homme* as well as a man of genius she entertained a series of fleeting passions. With the open eye of her upbringing, she could not help seeing what was wanting in her father, but she was really fond of him, made him a good daughter, in return for his indulgence, and when he departed, mourned him sincerely.

It was rather a shock to her to discover that the apparent affluence of the House of Adderley had no longer any solid basis. The settlement of Hiram's affairs took some time, during which she lived on quietly at The Laurels; for Potiphar, moved thereto by Amelia, had directed the family solicitor that Kitty was not to be hurried. She was warned that things might not turn out very well, but during the days of her mourning she was not allowed to feel any pressure. A sufficient allowance was paid to her month by month, until affairs could be wound up generally. Gradually Golithly's, as mortgagees of Hiram's remaining property, realised—once or twice, as it chanced, at a profit—and then, last of all, The Laurels came into the market, and Kitty knew that she would have to seek another home.

The chance realisations at a profit had given Potiphar considerable satisfaction, for Kitty's sake, and incidentally for his own. Amelia had followed up her first hint that they should do something for the girl; perhaps in the last event he would have consented, although he saw no particular claim; but now that a remnant really remained to Kitty of her own when all debts were paid,

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he could easily persuade Amelia that nothing need be done on their part.

"She'll have a clear three thousand, Amelia, my dear. She can't do better than keep it in Golightly's. We're paying fifteen per cent.; four-fifty a year for a single girl's not bad. She'll do very well on that, and get a nice man into the bargain for it, before long. I'll have her down to the office one day soon and have a chat with her."

"I *am* glad," Amelia replied; "but Kitty's an extravagant puss. She'll need it all. However, let's hope for the man, soon."

"*Quite* so," said Potiphar with a wink. For his own part he had ideas about the man, but of that he said nothing to his wife. He bade her write and ask Kitty to call on an early day at the office.

Potiphar was in conclave with the Editor of the *Beacon* when Miss Adderley's card was brought up. "Don't go for a minute, Dorian," he said. "She's a nice little piece. I can't remember whether you've met her."

"I saw her once, I think, at one of Mrs. Golightly's parties. Piquant face, if I remember, naughty black eyes, nice figure. But I wasn't introduced."

"That's Kitty! You've got her in one. Well, be introduced now. I'm glad to say there's a tidy bit over from the old man's wreck. Poor Hirie, he went a mucker at the end."

Kitty entered, elegantly pretty in her second mourning. She gave her hand graciously to Potiphar.

"How d'ye do, my dear?" he said warmly, giving her a chair. He introduced Dorian, who made a little pleasant small talk, and then, pleading urgent business, left his chief and his visitor to themselves.

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"That's my great Editor," said Potiphar, the owner of men. "Wonderful clever chap, Dorian."

"A pretty name," Kitty commented.

"Fine-looking fellow," Potiphar pursued.

"I hardly looked at him," Kitty answered mendaciously.

"I'll bet he looked at *you*," Potiphar pursued jocosely.

Kitty blushed. "Let's talk business, please, Mr. Golightly," she said, slightly ruffled.

"Must have my little joke, my dear," Potiphar returned, unabashed. "Well, well, to business!" He took up some memoranda from his desk and gave Kitty a very lucid and even masterly account of her fortunes, concluding with a proposal that he should be allowed to invest the three thousand pounds in the firm.

Kitty considered. "Of course, it's quite *safe*, Mr. Golightly?"

"Safe as the Bank of England, my dear. Golightly's will take a lot of breaking. We've caught the public, and we know how to keep it. And in time we mean to pay still more."

"What would I have a year?"

"Four hundred and fifty pounds, at present."

"Don't think I'm distrustful, Mr. Golightly, but do you know, a fancy investment doesn't appeal to me. I'd be eternally nervous about my capital. I'd very much prefer a safe three per cent."

"But ninety pounds a year would be less than nothing to you. Besides, Golightly's shares are always improving. You'd increase your capital and your dividends as well."

Kitty shrugged her shoulders. "I have control of the money, haven't I, Mr. Golightly?"

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"It's yours absolutely, my dear, to do what you like with. I've no right to interfere. But as your father's old friend I'd like to see you put it to the best use."

"I've got to be poor, Mr. Golightly, but I'd like to feel that I can't be poorer, whatever happens. I'll rub along somehow. Plenty girls do."

"Not girls brought up as you have been."

"I'll risk it. Thank you so much, Mr. Golightly, but I'd really prefer to have the money paid over to me, or at least invested in something safe and small."

"Oh, do be sensible, Kitty. Why, here's a fair little income offered you, and really quite safe. Or if you won't risk the Ordinaries, why not take five and a half per cent. Mortgage Debentures. That'll give you a bit more. We're still a private company, but one of these days we'll be floated as a public concern, and then you'll see how the public will rush to buy. Thousands would give their ears to have the chance I'm offering you. On the day we're floated, or the day after, you could make a little fortune with your holdings if you cared, and I'd let you come in again at par with your original capital plus your profits."

But Kitty was obdurate. Puzzled, Potiphar proposed that she should think it over for a little, and there they left it.

When Kitty had gone, Potiphar shook his head. "Women are a rum go," he said to himself. "The little fool."

"Little fool," he repeated a day or two later, when Kitty wrote to him that she would greatly prefer to have her three thousand now, in cash. "However, it's not

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for me to interfere. I've done my duty by her. She can try her own way."

He sighed and wrote to the firm's solicitor, who was also Kitty's. That good and wise man likewise did his best to keep the money out of the lady's fair fingers, but it was no use. "Out with my kingdom," cried this English Hilda Wangel, "my kingdom on the table!"

And so it had to be.

But Kitty saw her own plan of campaign, and it may be that she was not such a fool as Potiphar supposed. For the present, however, it had to wait a little. She was still in mourning, and that did not altogether fit the plan of campaign. At the sale of The Laurels she kept back and put into store a few favourite household gods and then disappeared, no one knew precisely whither. Only Mrs. Golightly cared to inquire. Kitty replied that she meant to stay for a time at some quiet economical place on the Continent. She did not give any address.

"What's the little monkey up to?" said Potiphar.

"I hope she hasn't gone to Monte," said Mrs. Golightly uneasily.

"Monte's not exactly quiet and economical, is it, Amelia?"

"Well, no. But that may be only a blind."

"Anyhow, it's none of our business," concluded Potiphar, and the subject dropped. Both had other and more intimate preoccupations.

The day was coming, however, when both Mr. and Mrs. Golightly would have to reckon with Kitty Adderley. But the hour of her blossoming was not yet.

CHAPTER VIII

THE VALUE OF CONTRASTS

AN invitation to dine *en famille* at Queen's Gate pitched Dorian's mood to the key of the pleasantly speculative. It was a long time since he had been summoned to anything but restaurant entertainments, or to crushes during the season at the Gollightly mansion. Amelia's note, written in the first person, suggested confidences. He allowed himself to wonder what they might be, but his fancies went very wide of the mark. The image of Amelia, that mature compromise between the buxom and the elegant, was occupying his leisure more and more. He played with it delicately, still in the half-sardonic vein. Of course, this vagrant fancy meant nothing, but there was no harm in indulging it. He was a confirmed bachelor now, he feared; women counted for nothing in his strenuous life, and this approach to a passion, if passion it were, was a thing so vague and indeterminate as to be entirely safe. But it made a spot of colour in rather monotonous days; for even the hourly excitement of his profession, once so endlessly amusing, had now fallen into the plane of routine. He did not need stimulus, but rather soothing. The large ox-eyed calm of Amelia's presence — cynics might have called it vacuity — was distinctly soothing. And she was so good to look at, she dressed so well, she talked so pleasantly, so worldly sensibly about men and things, that

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she always sent him away feeling a better man. It was all very good, and towards Potiphar there could be no treachery. The very thought was an insult, a profanation to Amelia, the matron inviolate. "Ox-eyed Hera," he murmured to himself, and the words came up with a little sting. What ages since he had even thought of Homer. That was part of a dead life. He took down a rather dusty Iliad and glanced at a page. Good heavens, what a lot of words he had forgotten the meaning of! Well, well, there was no money in the blind old bard, nowadays. Belzoni's mummy had dropped a halfpenny into Homer's hat. The charity was not reciprocal on the poet's part. Dorian, with a whimsical humour, recalled the words of Dean Gaisford's famously inappropriate Christmas sermon to an audience chiefly composed of college servants at Christ Church. "Nor can I do better, in conclusion," said the divine to the assembled scouts, "than impress upon you the study of Greek literature, which not only elevates above the vulgar herd, but leads not infrequently to positions of considerable emolument."

Well, other times, other manners. Dorian snapped the book together and put it back on the top shelf.

No, Potiphar had in Dorian no treacherous rival. No rival at all, in fact. But the thought of Potiphar was inevitable and faintly disturbing. That flash of unpleasant self-revelation at the Carlovingian supper-party had hinted at a possibility remote, yet actual. And from that possibility, what other possibilities might not follow? A tendency, as yet only a tendency, accelerated by carelessness fostered by subtlety—but this was hideous. Away with it! He had not come to this. He

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did not even desire Bathsheba. Any vagrant vision of Uriah in the hottest of the battle was therefore, on the face of it, absurd. Yes, absurd, that was the proper word. Dorian resolved to take more exercise. He had been neglecting golf lately. The *Beacon* had no use for morbidity.

On the appointed Saturday evening Stepney dressed at long leisure, and before he left his room he examined himself in the glass. It would have been sheer coxcombry to have denied that what he saw there was the image of a very presentable fellow. Yes, his new suit was all right. Well, that was as it should be. Even the most expensive tailors are not infallible, but this time the artist was justified of his handiwork. Dorian gave his moustache an extra twist skywards—he had an amiably absurd fancy that he resembled not remotely the Lord of War-Lords—took up his hat and coat and went downstairs, humming irrelevantly, “My love she’s but a lassie yet.”

A very choice, rather long cigarette, just lasted him until the hansom set him down at Queen’s Gate.

Dorian enjoyed his dinner. Amelia was very bright and charming. Her gossip was always new and interesting. She talked a very little about her eternal story. It had made some progress lately, but not much. Stepney wondered if this evening portended the beginning of the great work as a serial in the *Beacon*. Had Potiphar, the uxorious, been persuaded at last by wifely blandishments? Dorian did not relish the idea in any way. But Potiphar gave no sign. He had a great deal to say (“between you and me and Amelia, Dorian”) about the flotation of Golightly’s and all its “group”

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as a public company. That was soon to be *fait accompli*, it seemed. This, then, was probably the reason of the invitation. Already the careful Dorian saw himself receiving, with the chief's compliments, a handsome block of shares. Things grew rosy, and Potiphar kept the champagne well up to the mark in his guest's glass. His own glass, it seemed, was no loser. Once, and once only, Dorian caught Amelia's telegraphic glance to her lord, but he, already warm, made her dumb hint articulate with jocose comment.

"Nonsense, my dear," he protested, "I've only had half a glass. It isn't every night we have Dorian here *tet-ah-tet*. William, another of the Pommery and Greno."

"The shares," he went on, turning to Dorian, "will, of course, be fully underwritten; but there's no fear, my boy, no fear. The public will come tumbling over one another to get the stuff. We'll be subscribed three or four times over. My word, when it gets out, won't we be bombarded with prayers and supplications! Allotment 'll be no joke, Dorian, I know somebody that'll need a holiday when it's over."

"What, what, what?" he said a little later, "the bottle out already. It can't have had the full quantity, I'm sure, William!"

"Pharie dear," Mrs. Golightly interposed firmly.

Potiphar understood and subsided with despairing good humour. He did not guess that Mrs. Golightly had a telegraphic code for William also, and that the discreet young man had juggled away the new bottle, leaving the old one in its place.

"Ay, ay, Dorian," Golightly sighed, with the benignity

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of repletion, "wait till you get married, my boy, you'll know what it is not to be master even of your meats and drinks, if a bothering old specialist says the word."

"I'm a hopeless bachelor," Dorian replied. "At my age a man gets fixed in single blessedness, I fear."

"At *your* age!" Golightly returned, with a guffaw. "I like that! Hear 'im, Amelia, at 'is age!"

Mrs. Golightly was saved the embarrassment of a direct reply by the entrance of Osric. The boy was tall for his twelve years, fair, graceful, almost spiritual, a curious offshoot. His mouth told of discontent and petulance, but for the moment he was in a good temper, and he looked very sweet and fresh in his Eton jacket and wide collar. Amelia had taken care about one thing, that he should behave nicely to visitors. He gave his hand very prettily to Mr. Stepney, whom he liked. Dorian had a pleasing taste in the more expensive mechanical toys, and of that taste Osric was the better on birthdays and Christmas days.

"Well, Osric," Dorian began, "what's the latest thing with wheels?"

"Oh, a battleship. Had it at the Round Pond this afternoon. The beastly thing sank."

"Twenty-five bob gone! Bless me!" said Potiphar. "You'll ruin me, boy."

"Oh, we fished her out; but the clockwork will be all rusted. I say, Daddy, mayn't I have a real steam one? They're really awful cheap."

"What d'ye call cheap?"

"About two pounds."

"There, you see, Mr. Stepney, no idea of the value of money! Young spendthrift!"

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Potiphar blinked affectionately at his prodigal son.

"I forbid real steam toys," Amelia protested, fearful lest Dorian should pocket the hint. "He's too little. He'd blow himself up."

She put a sweet-dish before Osric. "Just two—no more, boysie."

Osric helped himself to three, Amelia ignored the rebellious act.

"Oh, *rot*, Mummie! I could easily manage a steam thing. Do say 'yes,' Daddy. I know where to get one I want, a beauty."

"We'll talk about that another time," said Potiphar, putting off the evil day. "If I get a good report from Mr. What's-his-name—you've had so many tutors I can't remember their names—perhaps Mummie will say 'yes.'"

"I make no promises," Amelia protested, with a poor show of firmness.

"Do say 'yes,' Mum darling."

The boy left his chair, and sidling up to his mother leaned against her and looked up into her face. Amelia put her arm round him. The group pleased Dorian and gave him an idea.

"There's a subject for Argent," he said to Potiphar, by way of diversion.

Potiphar beamed. "Gad, you're right," he exclaimed, "we'll have it done. It would make a first-class Christmas plate to give away with the *Fireside*—'Coaxing Mamma,' eh? Sell like hot cakes. The great man might make a reduction of price, considering the advertisement he would get."

"We could ask," Dorian conceded diplomatically. He

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had continually to save his chief from similar gaucheries. Golightly could never understand, with all his worldly wisdom, that publicity in one or other of the Golightly prints was not the be-all and the end-all here.

"Yes, yes, we'll ask. You might ring Mr. Argent up on the 'phone on Monday, Dorian, and mention the matter."

Dorian, determined to do no such thing, agreed with his lips. The "matter" could simmer for a little, and when the time came, it could be opened in the proper form, by letter, written in Dorian's choicest style and in Dorian's exquisite hand, the last unspoiled survival of the academic Stepney.

Meanwhile the son had returned to his place and, unrebuked, was punishing the sweets. Dorian, preoccupied with Potiphar's sudden inspiration; did not notice whether the boy had prevailed over his mother or not. But Osric's angelic face seemed to augur that he had. Stepney was disciplined Englishman enough to regret the signs of hopeless spoiling. He more than suspected that there had been no resistance in order to avoid an ugly scene before a stranger. For Amelia's sake, he wished to see her pretty cub sent out to be licked. He wondered whether he dared, at some opportune moment, say a word. But that was very difficult, without opening given.

The opening, however, was nearer than he dreamed. Osric was sent to bed, and went, after a little dilly-dallying. He wanted to talk to Mr. Stepney about an engine that had gone wrong. About ten minutes after he had been told to go he said good-night and disappeared, but not until he had secured a small haul of

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candied fruits when his mother was not looking.

Presently Amelia rose.

"We shan't sit," Potiphar said, as he opened the door for his wife. "Shall we have coffee all together in the library? It'll be cosier there."

The men did not sit down again, and followed Mrs. Golightly almost immediately.

It was certainly cosy in the library; the bright fire and the deep chairs looked very inviting, for it was a cold evening. Mrs. Golightly sat in the centre, keeping the blaze from her face with a copy of that week's *Fireside* — the most typically domestic of all the Golightly journals. Potiphar and Dorian were one at each side of the hearth. Golightly sank into his chair with a contented sigh, stretched his legs and fiddled with his seals, looked with drowsy amity at Amelia, pridefully at Dorian, and asked him what liqueur he preferred.

Small talk reigned while coffee was served.

"Now, Dorian," Potiphar remarked, offering his cigar-case, "you won't mind me making no stranger of you. You and Mrs. can amuse each other. I want to look over the proof of *the* prospectus."

Amelia resented the "Mrs." shorn of Golightly; but after dinner one could never be quite sure of Pharie. She took refuge in philosophy. But Stepney must have noticed. She had a little inward qualm. She glanced at Potiphar. He had put on his spectacles, had taken out a fat gold pencil-case, and reached over to a little writing table for a packet of papers. In a few seconds he was absorbed in the momentous prospectus, still in embryo. The pencil hung, wavered, descended, marked, scored out, rewrote. Golightly had mounted his *Pegasus*.

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In such tasks he knew something of the creator's joy.

"Osric grows, doesn't he?" Amelia said, almost with a sigh, to Dorian.

"Getting a big boy," Stepney replied. "It will soon be time for him to go to Eton, won't it?"

"In September," Amelia murmured, gazing into the fire. "I do hope he won't be bullied."

"First half is always a rather mixed joy," Dorian remarked, "but he'll soon get over it and find his feet, no fear." He spoke with a confidence he did not altogether feel; for he had taken the measure of the boy. With no preparatory school training, poor Osric would be terribly at sea. The boys, with their merciless insight, would discover his weak spots and flick them until they were raw. Still, school was a wonderful thing, even the least promising subjects often responded to discipline and learned to hold their own and to walk in the road that leads to manhood.

"Tell me," Amelia asked a little tremulously, "do they practise awful cruelties?"

"Boys will be boys," Dorian answered guardedly. "But Osric, although he looks fragile, is rather fit physically, I think. But the great thing is to keep one's temper. Blind rage simply delivers a boy over to the tormentors."

Amelia quailed, but resolved to give Osric good advice. The stable door, however, should have been locked long ago.

"Then," she went on, "you say it's not so awfully bad."

"It's a necessary evil, dear Mrs. Golightly, that every boy must go through, if he's to be any good in the world. Frankly, I may tell you that it will be harder for Osric, because he hasn't been away from home before,

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but he has the making of a fine little fellow in him, and good looks help a boy wonderfully. If I might suggest, I would tell him that good temper and no sulks or cheek to seniors will carry him through wonderfully. He must bear cheerfully hardness and even injustice, and I beseech you, Mrs. Golightly, if he complains, take no notice of it. You may if you like satisfy yourself privately, although that's very difficult, that things are not going too far, but to show the boy himself sympathy, is fatal. Forgive me. Do I seem to lecture you?"

"Not at all. You interest me immensely. I know so little of what is before Osric, poor lamb. You have been through the mill, you see. I'm truly grateful for your advice. I fear I've rather spoiled the child. Sometimes I feel that I can't let him go, when he could have tutors at home until it's time for him to go to college."

"Believe me, Mrs. Golightly, that would be the least wise thing possible. It will be hard for *you*, I know, but only for a little. Wait until you see him come home, vacation after vacation, better and brighter and manlier every time. Then one day, no doubt, we'll all go up to Lord's to see him play for his school, and later, perhaps, for the 'Varsity."

Amelia flushed. She had hardly thought of that. But it was a triumph very dear to a mother's heart. She had seen women in an exquisite flutter of pride on such high days, but she had not applied the emotion to herself. Her boy was still her baby. She had looked back to the tender ineffable pleasure of her early days of motherhood rather than forward to the time when she would realise that she had borne a man, able to play his part manfully among men. How wonderfully Dorian could put things,

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Now Pharie—but hush! She supposed it was all a matter of upbringing, of training, of being put through a certain mill. Somehow Mr. Stepney had never seemed so attractive before. This—the Amelia of former days rose for one insurgent moment—this, she supposed, was what came of being a real gentleman.

She looked into the fire, seeing visions and dreaming dreams. Yes, whatever it might cost her of agony and tears, Osric must be made a gentleman of. A strange wave of emotion shook her. Temperamentally, she responded to this graciousness in men: she had missed something in life, her birthright? Perhaps. If only she had known more earlier. But she had always lived in *that* world; how otherwise could she have succeeded so well with her Duchesses, of whom she wrote as one to the manner born.

She felt very grateful to Mr. Stepney for this intimate revelation of his finer self. And yet, how clever he was; he could combine it, she knew, with qualities quite different. Pharie had always told her that Dorian was an iron man of business. “Sharp as they make ’em.” And yet, how sympathetically he had talked to-night. And what a beautiful voice he had. They both sat silent for a while.

Suddenly they were recalled to the present by a touch of the incongruous. A snore, deep, stertorous, extraordinarily earthly, broke the sacred silence.

The prospectus, in embryo, had slid to the floor. The labourer, his work not yet quite accomplished, had yielded to the spell of good cheer and fireside comfort. Potiphar had sunk deeper into his easy chair, his head lolled back, his mouth was open, his eye-glasses

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were tilted at a grotesque angle on his fleshy nose.

Another sense than sight was assailed ungraciously. Potiphar's cigar, just falling from his relaxed fingers, was slowly burning a hole in his shirt-front.

Amelia rose and, with gentle hands, removed the danger. "Pharie," she said softly. "Pharie dear, you're asleep."

"Eh, what, my dear? Oh — eh — um — yes, bless me, so I was, what's burning?" He looked down. "Oh, damn! I beg your pardon, Amelia, my dear.— What, you're not goin', Dorian. You must have a whisky and soda."

But Dorian, protesting that it was getting very late, said good night. He drove away assailed by thoughts of which he was ashamed. But to-night they would not be denied.

And Amelia, following her lord upstairs, a precautionary disorder of precedence lest his drowsy foot should slip, caught herself reflecting upon the value of contrasts.

CHAPTER IX

FLOTATIONS

THE flotation of Golightly's manifold concerns as one colossal company was all that Potiphar had hoped, and more. He was thrilled by the proofs of public confidence, and this compensated him for the endless worry of the process. He was beset on all sides by hordes of sycophants, pleading to get in on the ground floor so as to stag the market. He had not realised, until he received their letters, how many people believed that they had paramount claims upon his gratitude, his generosity. Like a plague of flies, the women with whom Amelia had more or less acquaintance descended upon him, often in person, to solicit with perfumed blandishments the favour of Golightly's inestimable scrip. But through it all, Potiphar, braced for business and, for the moment, putting aside the insidious temptations to easeful life and pleasant self-indulgence, ploughed with a steady hand. He considered every personal application himself, gave or withheld, according to the dictates of high policy, and, at last, after a spell of Herculean toil, to which he lent himself unsparingly, the letters of allotment and regret were posted, and Golightly's was launched as a public company in being. The capital offered to the public had been subscribed five times over. Potiphar leaned upon his oars, satisfied. It was a good day's work. He was justified of

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his place as a great Captain of Industry. He must still work, however, for he had retained a very large holding in the business. The time to slip out was not yet. Only Osric could relieve guard, and that was some distance ahead. But he had realised a considerable reward for his life-struggle: in wise proportion, however, for the Board of Trade official, who sits silently yonder in a little first-floor room in Horse Guards Avenue, diligently examining and reporting to the Powers on every new Prospectus, had no fault to find with Potiphar's charge for the goodwill of the business. Golightly's was sound. It appealed to the small investor. Potiphar had taken care that the small investor should be considered. He also took care to support the market himself, so far as dealing in the stock was concerned. Two days after flotation the £1 ordinaries stood at 25s. In a month's time the Company would declare a brilliant dividend, and the shares might be expected to leap to a fancy price. All was right with the world. Potiphar took a month's holiday, conscious that it had been well earned. He was secretly glad of the excuse to take Amelia abroad, for Osric had at last gone to school, and his mother, beset with anxieties, had begun to fret. She tried to be loyal to Stepney's advice and hold aloof, now that the boy, like the Company, was fairly launched on life, but the effort told upon her. There had, of course, been trouble with Osric at first: he had demanded with prayers and tears to be brought home; but there Potiphar, to his credit, was quite firm. At the end of a fortnight poor, fond, foolish Amelia had gone to see the apple of her eye. She returned tearful and upset to find her lord, for the first time, deaf to every persuasive art she knew. Poti-

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phar loved his wife and his son, but he also loved Golightly's. Between him and the vision, duly discounted, of a tormented Osric came the vision of the House, the work of Potiphar's hands. The King's Government must be carried on, and in the direct line of succession, one day. And the successor must be trained.

"My son," said Potiphar decisively, "must learn not to be a milksop. Leave him alone. You oughtn't to have gone to see him, Amelia."

And therewith, disregarding gentle complaints that he was cruel and that his dear little son was being murdered by a horde of nasty boys, Potiphar directed his wife to accompany him abroad. For the first time since her marriage Amelia feared this man, who could remain unmoved even to her softest charm. She had not believed it possible. Wondering, trembling, and just a shade resentful, she prepared to obey.

To Stepney she went with her troubles. He met them with delicate sympathy, but supported his chief's view loyally.

"It is the best way, believe me, dear Mrs. Golightly. Leave the boy alone. In a few weeks he'll be all right. And you, if I may dare to say so, will be better to be beyond easy reach of school."

Amelia rose and looked out of the window. She was very busy with her handkerchief. When she turned round she was calm, almost heroic. How was it that this man gave her strength even to disregard her child? He seemed to send her thoughts forward to the coming man, not back to the baby. She must cultivate this forward attitude, if she would avoid being crushed by her fears.

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Dorian looked at her with an understanding that came near to worship in his eyes. Yes, Amelia had the making of a great woman in her. She gave the lie to her years so charmingly that Dorian forgot she had reached the period when a woman is for the most part set and inflexible, unless she be thrown out of herself by passion. But that miracle is rare. When it happens, however, to a woman of Amelia's age, it can whirl her to any height of sacrifice, to any depth of folly. The two are sometimes inextricably interwoven, for the height of sacrifice is often the depth of folly.

Dorian was still young and very good to look upon, and Amelia was a beautiful woman somewhat starved in the finer possibilities of her nature. In the matter nearest to her heart this man had shown her a sympathy such as she had never known. And withal it seemed that he could rule her, *over* rule her, she meant, and not in Pharie's way. Poor Pharie! Yet still, the two men were quite agreed about the boy. Strange. But she knew in which of them she believed most. Had Dorian been Osric's father she would have gladly taken his word for law in the upbringing of the child. She was quite sure she would, at least. However, she had always the model before her. It would be nice to see Osric grow up clever and cultivated, nice in his ways with women, and yet as a business man so capable. One must always remember the business. It supplied the spoiled pussy-cat comforts — warm milk and soft-lying — without which Amelia could not live. If Osric must follow his father, and she supposed that he must, for her dream of the diplomatic service grew more uncertain — well, he could not find a

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better pattern than the man who, next his father, was the mainstay of Golightly's.

In the jealous reserve of her virtue, Amelia had never allowed herself to catch Potiphar's easy habit of calling Stepney by his Christian name, although the relaxing manners of the age and the domestic familiarity between chief, chief's wife, and valued lieutenant, might have permitted it without adverse comment. But, to-day as she turned to leave Dorian's rooms, where she would now and then drop in for a cup of tea and a philosophic duologue on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon, Amelia was surprised out of herself by contending emotions.

"Thank you so much," she said, as she rose to go. "You help me wonderfully. I fear I shan't see you again until we return." She held out her hand. "Good-bye, Dorian."

Thrilled, he lifted her fingers to his lips. Amelia made no resistance. She drove home in a strange whirl of excitement. What had come to her? For a moment she enjoyed the new glamour. Then she shrank into a corner of her carriage, appalled.

Why did memory play such tricks? And why should she have recalled, with grotesque irrelevance, that old tragi-comedy of Potiphar's first time of asking, when she had refused him because of his Egyptian name?

CHAPTER X

PLANS OF CAMPAIGN

“**S**O now for the Plan of Campaign,” said Kitty Adderley.

Her lively ladyship was ready to return to London, but as yet she had not revealed that interesting fact to any of her friends. These friends, she imagined, were likely to be a rather diminished company; for the daughter of old Hiram Adderley, of The Laurels, Thames Ditton, and a young lady of reduced means were, Kitty had seen enough to know, two very different people. There is nothing like a little breeze of adversity for giving one exact knowledge as to the way in which acquaintances will trim their sails. But Kitty was not inclined at present to make the experiment. Her natural shrewdness told her in advance who would be likely to tack and drift away, but, unfortunately, these were the very people who could be most useful to her. The arrant time-servers, rightly handled, are the best tools of the time-server. The faithful friend is for the most part a person too genuinely good ever to have made himself influential in this world, however strong his hold may be on the next. For the truly faithful Kitty took no concern; they would always be at hand if they were wanted, but they were not likely to be wanted very much. It was on the others that she had her eye. They must be kept

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in tow at all costs. How to keep them was Kitty's game.

In the ranks of the really influential, however, she recognised one grand exception. Mrs. Golightly would never give her the cold shoulder. She might even show an embarrassing concern for Kitty's welfare. That was just a little bit awkward, as it happened, for Miss Adderley desired no chaperon. She was, as she said to herself elliptically, "on her own," and "on her own" she meant to continue. Besides, there were other and deeper reasons why she wanted no interference of Amelia Golightly's, but her strategy in that direction was for the present vague. It might always remain vague. She could not tell. However, she would do her best to leave Amelia out until she saw. It should not be very difficult, after all. If the worst came to the worst, Amelia could be trusted to rise to the occasion. But if Kitty could help it, the worst should never come to the worst. Rather should the best come to the best, the best being, as ever, Number One; for, in our own conceits, there is no better.

In her quiet retreat on the French coast, where, living quite pleasantly on next to nothing and enjoying her own company, the prudent Kitty had served out her time of mourning, she had taken strict stock of her affairs, and had at last filled in the details of her plan. Prominent before her eyes rose Money; less prominent, but still essential, appeared Man. By way of the former she should achieve the latter, and vice versa, but all in good time. The good time she would have, though it meant the Melting of Money. But as Money melted, so the Man must materialise; with Money's exhaustion, Man must intervene, and thus open a primrose path to—

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More Money, without which Man, whatever his virtues, would be ineligible. It might not be quite easy to adjust the time-table, the good-time-table; still the game was worth risking. Anyhow it was better than starvation on a tuppenny annuity. The annuity need not have been quite tuppenny, if she had followed Potiphar's advice, but for reasons of her own she was not taking any stock in Potiphar, thank you. And her way, despite risks, was much more umteedoodleum, not to say dinky; Miss Adderley's sweet lips, purists will note with pain, were much given to deplorable slang, which a conscientious chronicler has no option but to reproduce. Even the indirect speech does not save his spiritual torments, but he must accept Hobson's choice and take Kitty as he finds her.

Man, though vague, had still certain outlines, more or less clearly seen. Kitty, seated on a rock one fine afternoon and gazing out upon the Channel, with its gliding ships, indulged in an old day-dream. It took her back to a garden-party at Thames Ditton. The affair was a mere interlude, light come, light go, it had led nowhere, yet it left a memory. She would gladly have followed it further, but fate forbade. There had been talk, pleasant and engrossing, a flash of sudden intimacy, over the strawberries and cream, a drawing together of two minds that met on common ground. But it ended with a smile and a bow. She had never seen him again. She wondered whether she ever would. Not unless she tried. Opportunity is of our own making. There was just one chance. Kitty resolved to take it, absurd and quixotic though it seemed, when she returned to London. Kitty was devoted to music, the best music; so was he. That

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had been the link. That should be the link. He had said he never missed a Symphony Concert, and really he had talked charmingly about things musical. He knew what he was saying. Perhaps, for she was still young, Kitty would have liked him to be a little younger than he was. Still, that didn't matter, for he had, in addition to his other attractions, something that young men seldom have, something essential, and in abundance, fabulous abundance, someone had told her. And he was still very nice-looking, upright, and of a disciplined figure. Any tendency to racial stoutness he had kept under, perhaps by severe gymnastics. Anyhow, there he was, sufficiently graceful to please a romantic girl's eye. If his pocket bulged, so much the better; that could never offend a practical girl's eye. Stay, was there any barrier of Creed? No, Kitty had made inquiries, and had been assured that her chance acquaintance (or was it his father?) had subscribed to the Thirty-nine Articles, and would cheerfully subscribe to Forty, if that way advantage should lie. Altogether a most eligible *parti*.

Interwoven, however, with this day-dream, was a second, more pleasing in some ways, less in others, that had first glimmered on Kitty's mental horizon the day of her visit to Potiphar's office. That great man's jocosely innuendoes had annoyed her more than she cared to admit to herself, and she had fibbed disgracefully when she declared to the chief that she had not looked at the lieutenant. There was something, after all, in youth, real youth, that is, not merely well-preserved youth. But this was all very absurd, impracticable, impossible. Between the two dreams how could a sensible girl hesitate for a moment? But this was going rather fast. Not

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only were Kitty's chickens not hatched, but the eggs were scarcely laid. Arithmetic, except compound addition, must wait awhile. And then, too, before anything of that kind happened there was the good time to be had. And a rattling good time, in the service of perfect freedom it was to be. London was a wonderful place, if one only knew how to use it aright. And now that women, young women, were beginning to look over the nest, the possibilities were growing jollier every day. The months of dool were over. Heigh ho, then, for London and London life, to be tasted with a gusto that Kitty had never known! Three thousand pounds, judiciously laid out by a single woman, could purchase a good deal of enjoyment. And at the end, well, it would not be a single woman who would have to reckon with what lay beyond.

Kitty rose, smoothed down her dainty plain skirts, laughed back to the innumerable laughter of the sea that sparkled in spring-time merriment, and, twirling her parasol, returned slowly to her lodging to pack. Evening found her on board the Dover boat. The world was all before her.

CHAPTER XI

MARCH OF EVENTS

MEANWHILE, in Kitty's Promised Land, events had marched, and in one throbbing region of the London world there had arisen rumours, whispers, the idle curiosity of an hour, to be listened to, commented on with a shrug by the experts, paragraphed sporadically by half-crown hunting scribes in the gossiping corners of quasi-literary journals, and then forgotten. Such mushroom growths were, at that period, the commonplaces of every day. Without knowing it, certain wise men of the East Central District applied the ancient maxim, "All is flux, nothing steadfast"; this flare-up would be as others: as for the inspired ass who had hinted at a serious attack on the impregnable House of Golightly, tush! the poor devil had to vary his paragraph somehow with a "new fact," in order to sell once more a commodity that was waxing somewhat stale. He laughs best who laughs last. The final and optimate laugh would shake the increasing paunch of Potiphar, and all would be well.

"Pot's in his sanctum: all's right with the world,"

sang one of the great chief's clever, well-read, ribald young men. And among the deathless gods of the staff arose laughter inextinguishable.

But silently, slowly, surely in those pleasant Embank-

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ment Chambers, once sacred to Solomon's lighter recreations, Stingo and Rheingold, served by Punchie Hay, served in his turn by the inestimable Durfey, had spun their web, of which the first filaments had now been allowed to float out upon the breeze in the direction of the Strand and Fleet Street. Mr. Durfey (instructed by Mr. Hay) had given a little, a very little, discreet information to a man — a reporter known as Inky Bob — with whom he played dominoes at the tea-shop. He did not, of course, connect himself or his master with the rumour.

"I hear as how ——" began Mr. Durfey, and at the phrase his companion, scenting thirty pieces of copper, was all agog. Durfey, the detached, made his meagre communication.

"Nothing in that," remarked Inky Bob judiciously, memorising his facts, such as they were.

"Fancy not," replied Thomas, and therewith, having administered his pill to purge melancholy, he shuffled the dominoes for another game.

The rumour once afoot, ran through an amazing series of metamorphoses, one of its forms being that Golightly had bought the *Times*. This being well within the bounds of probability, found considerable vogue, and involved Potiphar in a great deal of unnecessary and unwelcome correspondence. He was besieged, too, by the everlasting applicant, and, at last, exasperated, he bade Dorian kill the nuisance, once for all, by a neat, firmly-worded notice in the *Beacon*.

"In view of certain rumours that have unfortunately obtained currency in the Press and elsewhere, we are authorised by Mr. P. Golightly to state decisively that

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Golightly's Ltd. has not purchased the *Times* newspaper, nor has the Company ever contemplated any such step."

That abated the worst of the annoyance; but a lying paragraph, once set afloat, can never be wholly overtaken and reversed. For a long time after the announcement of Potiphar's purchase of the *Times*, the thing, in many grotesque disguises, returned to smite him from the four quarters of the globe.

The *Times* canard amused and delighted the Unholy Alliance of Stingo, Rheingold and Hay in conclave. It touched Rheingold, whose sense of humour was exquisite, to a fine issue of generosity. Passing through the Durfeian antechamber after a conference, he tipped Thomas a sovereign. That humorist took it gratefully, without questions asked, and the same night, on a moiety of the coin, Inky Bob achieved a superhuman felicity, without knowing why. Two days later, when his hat felt the right size again, he got a little more valuable copy out of Durfey. This time it was a straight tip. But Robert asked for authorities. That is always the way. He had swallowed the canard. Over the truth he boggled.

"But 'ow d'ye know, Durfey?" he asked warily, playing a domino.

"Never you mind. But it's all right. I go about a bit, you see. An agent's clerk hears a lot."

"Who's in it, then?"

"Blessed if I know. But it'll be no go. Bust in six months or sooner, I reckon."

"Sure to," returned the Inky sage.

It was Inky Bob's second paragraph that the knowing ones laughed to scorn. Even when the advertisement

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manager of the *Beacon* came over to Potiphar (with him Mr. Dorian Stepney) bearing a proof of a whole-page advertisement just offered by the most reputable of all agencies, the Olympians were unmoved.

"What now, Anderson?" Potiphar asked genially.

"Look at this; what do you make of it?"

Potiphar put up his eye-glasses and read the display.

"Make of it, Anderson? Some fool with money to burn starting a new paper, that's all. Can't you read, man?"

"But the *Torch*, sir, the *Torch*, the most up-to-date morning daily? Look at the items. Doesn't it seem the least bit like a serious rival?"

"Time enough to ask that a year hence. You're getting nervous, Anderson, in your old age. Let's see, are you turned forty yet?"

Anderson ignored his chief's threadbare joke. "Then we'll take it?"

"Take it, by all means, and repeat as often as they want — and can pay for."

"It's cash in advance, of course."

"Then why the devil, my dear Anderson, do you come bothering me about this trifle? Oh, you canny Scotchman! Have a whisky and soda? Better still, come out to lunch. I've something to say to you. By the way, Dorian, what's your opinion of this ad.?"

"Poof!" said Dorian, as though he were blowing out the *Torch*.

"Quite so," Potiphar agreed. "You come out to lunch too, Dorian. I wonder who the DD. asses are who are tryin' this game. Well, our full-pages will bleed them a bit at the start anyhow. Look here, Anderson,

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give them credit if they need it — then perhaps we can put in the brokers before long. Or, if it looks like catching on, we can always buy them up, eh, Dorian? Have you heard anything about who's doing it?"

"Not a word. There were some pars flying about, but they were of no consequence. Where's their office, Anderson?"

Anderson looked at the advertisement. "Doesn't say," he replied. "I asked Plumlegs when they sent in the ad. where it came from. They didn't know, except from some City solicitor. A clerk gave the order and paid cash."

"Rum," said Potiphar, "but there's nothing in it. Small people always make fools of themselves with elaborate secrecy. They overrate their importance. My gad, they might have blazed it to the heavens for all it matters to us. By the by, Dorian, my boy, I ought by rights to sack you and your whole staff for knowing nothing about this business. Ho, ho!"

"All right," Dorian replied airily. "We'll just step over to the enemy. You'll be round to-morrow or the day after to buy us back or to buy us up and take charge generally."

Potiphar smote his lieutenant a resounding slap on the shoulder. "Good lad!" he cried. "Always ready for the emergency and seeing ahead. But get your hat and come on. I'm wonnerful sharp-set."

It was curious how Potiphar, urged by strong physical needs, could revert to the homely speech of Marsh-by-the-Pound.

On the way to the Savoy, Dorian's thoughts were little occupied with the new paper, although it gave the chief

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and Anderson a cue for endless jokes. He knew Potiphar's mood, and saw where it would lead to-day. Unless someone deputised for Amelia, the chief would not transact much business this afternoon, and there were several important things to be done. The habit of conviviality was growing on Golightly, and to that there could be but one end, sooner or later. Stepney knew that with a little diplomacy on his part, this afternoon's business need not suffer, although the chief and Anderson were now liking each other prodigiously — the pair were a very Tam-o'-Shanter and Souter Johnny when they got well settled. But, across the path of plain duty, or, to put it no higher, of mere policy, flitted curious disturbing visions, ugly fascinating shapes that would not be exorcised.

Sorely blunted though he was in his finer nature, Dorian was still a man of imagination. He knew what those vile shapes portended, and he told himself he would put them to flight. But the insidious indulgence of another passion, now a passion imperious and undeniable, had loosened his armour. And after all, if the old fool chose to be — a fool, what business was it of Dorian Stepney's? By no sophistry could he be called Golightly's keeper. As for his brother, absurd!

Again he reproached himself for neglecting his golf. But really of late he had had so many preoccupations of business — and pleasure.

CHAPTER XII

THE ELEVENTH CRUSADE

POTIPHAR, Dorian, and, incidentally, the world were not left long in doubt as to the intention of the *Torch*. The sudden blaze of advertisement in all the papers—a blaze so broad that it proclaimed abundant means to buy the fuel—was followed without a breathing space by the issue of the first number. By that time Dorian's jackals, now alert, had discovered a good deal that was worth knowing about the new venture. Its offices were in some new buildings in the dim regions behind Drury Lane. The preparations had certainly been made with masterly secrecy and cunning. The editor and a skeleton staff had been at work there for weeks getting out "dummies" and generally bringing the machinery into something like gear. Only after the first formal announcement did the *Torch* advertisement canvassers assail the business strongholds. They did not expect to pick up much at first, but they got something for a beginning. An opening number has always a circulation of curiosity.

When Dorian heard the editor's name, he had a slight qualm, and at a question from Potiphar, he lied.

"Know anything of this chap, 'ay?" the chief inquired.

"Nothing, except that he was sacked, they say, from some paper or other."

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Had Dorian told Potiphar whence Punchie had been sacked, had he added what he knew of the little man's ability, he would have got into his first scrape with Go-lightly. Like a hawk Potiphar would have descended with a cry:

"Then why the devil, Stepney, if he's so damned clever as all that, didn't you get him back to us long ago?"

It was unanswerable and not to be risked. But Potiphar, without certificates from Dorian, was forming his own opinion of Punchie Hay. As morning followed morning, and as weeks lengthened into months and still the *Torch* burned, Potiphar began to look at the sheet seriously. At the outset he had dismissed it with "Not much in that, anyhow."

But the thing persisted. It was there, a newspaper in being; and undeniably it was a rival, in intention at least. It might yet be one in achievement.

"I must say, Dorian," said Potiphar one afternoon, "that *Torch* is deuced cleverly done. *Hay* must have some brains. He's up to us at every turn. He misses nothing. Was he ever here?"

"He was never one of your staff."

"Well, he ought to have been. Have you any idea who's behind him?"

"That's what nobody knows or can find out. I've tried every way, only to come up to a brick wall. But there's money there."

"For the present, yes," said Potiphar, winking. "But will it last? I wish I knew who's at the back of it all. However, we can hold our own and more."

"We can," said Dorian decisively. But for all his

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confidence, the *Torch* had cost him something. He had to redouble his vigilance; he was conscious of a strain, mental and physical, more severe than he had ever known. Not only had he to respond to every daring move of Punchie's, but he had to go one better, in advance. The *Beacon*, bright enough before, had now to glow incandescent. For the first time the paper knew what serious competition meant. Hitherto it had held the field alone. The graver dailies, grotesque in their minor affectations of the newer methods, had not counted. They remained apart, as the *Beacon* itself stood apart and unique. Dorian braced himself for the effort, telling himself that the rival could not last, if he put his best foot foremost. But it was formidable, or threatening to grow formidable. Little by little its advertisement sheets increased; the really good people, the paying people, the soaps and the chocolates, the food for babes, the old-established infallible remedies, so infallible and long-established that it seemed a marvel that poor humanity should still have any ailments left to cure, began to "take space" with Punchie. That meant only one thing. Punchie was making a circulation. Already at early morning a galaxy of bright-coloured carts, with a symbolic torch painted on their sides, flashed east and west and north and south bearing Punchie's Message to the Million, or soon to be the million. In railway carriages matutinal, packed with City-faring workers, the once unbroken phalanx of *Beacons* on this side and on that, was now punctuated with sporadic *Torches*. Men began to discuss the relative merits of the two papers. Dorian, returning from a week-end at Brighton, noted the portent with his first

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real alarm. A line from an ancient writer rang mocking through his brain. "And they who carry the torches pass them from one to the other." That was the worst of a torch, it was easily communicable. A *Beacon*, however bright, was a *fixed* light. *Absit omen!* Yes, *Absit omen*, and confound Punchie Hay, and doubly confound the lack of foresight that had not caught and held that brilliant little spark to the everlasting service of Golightly's. There was only one way. He must speak to Potiphar.

Potiphar, who had also observed the heavens, agreed heartily. Machinery, tortuous and underground, was set in motion. Potiphar and Dorian waited impatiently for the result. Some time had to elapse before it could be known, for the affair could not be hurried. But at length, on a day, they saw the secret emissary (by appointment) to hear his message.

"Well?" said Potiphar, leaning forward in his chair, his eyes bulging, his face unpleasantly red. Dorian, in a superior way, looked desperately annoyed. "What did he say?" inquired Potiphar.

"Told me to go to the devil," said the emissary sourly. He had been promised a commission on success.

"Oh, all right," said Potiphar carelessly. "It's of no consequence. Good day."

But the emissary lingered. "Where do I come in?" he asked, truculently.

"You go out!" said Potiphar, pointing to the door.

"It wouldn't be—altogether convenient, would it, for it to get about that Golightly's had tried to buy over——?"

"It doesn't matter tuppence to Golightly's whether

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it gets about or not. And even if it did, you're not the only channel of information. Besides, it won't be believed. On the face of it the thing's absurd. Golightly's fear that rag! Not exactly. You know nothing of our motives, remember, and your business wasn't to draw inferences, but merely to deliver a plain message. If you want any more jobs from me, you'll forget all about this one."

"Give me a fiver, Mr. Golightly." The truculence had vanished.

"My good man, your news isn't worth a halfpenny to anybody now. Have you seen to-day's *Torch*?"

"No, sir, I admit I haven't."

"Well, here's a penny for you. Buy a *Torch* as you go out, and if you read it carefully perhaps you will see something that will amuse you. Or stay, you can keep your penny. Here's a spare *Torch* for you." Potiphar pressed the paper under the arm of the astonished minion and almost pushed him to the door.

Outside, the emissary opened the sheet and read:

**"AMAZING TRIBUTE TO THE INSTANTANEOUS SUCCESS OF
THE 'TORCH.'**

WELL-KNOWN NEWSPAPER'S ATTEMPT

TO BUY OUR EDITOR.

HE DECLINES THE OFFER.

"A few days ago a well-dressed but evidently impecunious individual, of the sort that picks up a precarious livelihood by running shady errands, called at this office, and by using a great, even a distinguished

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name, managed to obtain an interview with the Editor. It appeared that the proprietors of certain publications, alarmed by the success of the *Torch*, had sent this gentleman to make overtures to the Editor with a view to his transferring his services to one or other of their papers. The Editor, disguising his blushes, rang for our stalwart *commissionaire*, and the interview came to an abrupt conclusion. Comment is needless."

When the door had closed on the emissary, Potiphar and Dorian looked at one another. Potiphar's eye was unpleasant.

"You've gone a bloomer this time, Stepney," said the chief. "It was all your idea."

Dorian shrugged his shoulders. It was the first time he had ever heard a word of censure from Golightly. "Of course," he said, "one couldn't have foreseen such a low-down dodge as this. It's infamous!"

"It's infernally *clever*," Potiphar retorted, with sneaking admiration and obvious point. "That chap Hay's all alive."

Golightly said no more, and the incident was closed, but it left a bitter taste in Dorian's mouth. Potiphar had tasted blood. After this, there was no depth of unscrupulousness he would not approve and even commend. Later he might openly demand it. Hitherto Dorian had drawn the line at certain practices that seemed too "yellow." But now he must be a whole-hogger. Well, it was no time for half-measures. Dorian flung his last rags of scruple to the winds and prepared to serve Golightly as Golightly evidently desired to be served. Long ago he had bidden good-bye to

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ideals, though he had saved some shreds by instinct. But, as he withdrew to his own room, he felt, for he had still the wreck of a fine mind, perverted and seared as it was, that things could never be quite the same again between him and Potiphar. And with the consciousness of broken continuity came a curious exaltation, quite unconnected with business; a subtle and evil satisfaction that this man was now less his friend than before. It opened up possibilities. On these he would not allow himself to dwell at present, but he knew that the idea was not displeasing. In time he would be able to entertain this devil, not unawares.

Meanwhile, in those snug Embankment Chambers, still retained as the secret meeting-place of the Triumvirate, Stingo, Rheingold, and Hay were reviewing, not without satisfaction, their first half-year's labours. The stroke of the morning had brought Punchie congratulations.

"It was awfully neat, Hay," Solomon remarked delicately, offering his cigarette-case.

"All the talk at the club," Stingo guffawed, with his big, hearty, Yorkshire manner, and his golden beard wagged to his laugh. "It's a nasty one for Golightly's. Nobody doubts who's meant. There's a lot of curiosity about our little news-letter. Several men have been asking me if I'd any idea who's behind it. Told them I'd *heard* it was old Uff, the Diddlebury soap-boiler. They thought it very likely, and one inspired person—you know the inevitable oracle—actually could swear for a fact that it was."

"The advertisement for the *Torch* is inestimable," Solomon commented, with the slight suspicion of lisp

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that beset his use of many sibilants in succession. It was his one betrayal. He looked towards the future and blew dainty smoke-rings into the air.

"When do we spring another mine, Hay?" Stingo inquired.

"All in good time," said Punchie; "I'm ready, but we mustn't go too fast."

"Nor too slow," said Solomon. "I suppose it's the snippet weekly next?"

Punchie nodded. "I've got the right man, and a boy or two. That's all we need. The man, in fact, is not much more than a boy. They're all graduates——"

"Hey?" said Stingo apprehensively. "What's that?"

"*Restez tranquille, Monsieur.* Graduates of Board Schools in Camberwell, Hoxton, and Canning Town. They know, to a hair, how many monkeys' tails, end on end, would stretch to the moon."

"Oh, get along, Hay," said Sir Bradford. "You're a mad wag; but I must say you gave me a turn with your graduates."

"There's one thing, however, I wish to say," Punchie pursued, ignoring the pleasantry. "There's a source of profit Golightly has left untapped——"

Solomon pricked up his ears. "What may that be?" he asked, incredulous.

"It is," Punchie replied solemnly, "a sort of Golightly's Scrap-Book, but run on strictly religious lines. The religious public, my dear sir, or the public that mistakes itself for religious—a much larger body—is the greatest Gull in Christendom. Let us provide it with a Horn-Book!"

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"And with suitable garbage," added Solomon. "By Jove, Hay, I believe you've hit upon a good thing!"

"There is no doubt about the matter," Punchie declared in firm tones. "We shall do it in style. I have discovered an incomparable editor."

"Yes?" came Solomon's gentle interrogative. "A former editor of ——"

"No, a fresh hand and a fresh eye. A man, too, who has tasted the bitterness of life to the dregs, who can speak from the heart. I have taken it upon me to send him to the United States, to purchase to himself the degree of Doctor of Divinity at one of the smaller universities, where such baubles may be exchanged for dollars. It will look well on the outside cover."

"Capital!" roared Stingo.

"And who is this paragon?" Solomon inquired sceptically.

"None other than our friend Durfey."

"Look here, Hay," Solomon interposed gravely, "I like your humour, but isn't this — well — perhaps just carrying it a little too far? Tom Durfey, D.D.! The ridicule of the name would kill us."

"My dear sir, the people who would see the joke are an infinitesimal minority. To the huge public we are aiming at the name suggests nothing. The smart things of this world are a sealed book to them. And contrariwise, the clever ones of this world will never see a single issue of *Sundays Well Spent*, as I propose to call our paper. It will circulate in the back-parlour and the suburban kitchen, bringing brightness and joy to toil-worn hearts. *Sundays Well Spent*, a magazine for the

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Home, Edited by the Rev. Thomas Durfey, D.D. The motto beneath will be:

'A Sabbath well spent
Brings a week of content.'

Price 1d. weekly. 'Buy it to-day and every Saturday.' It is a dead cert. Old Golightly will gnash his teeth that he never thought of it. Curious, considering his early history, that he never did. But a thing can be held so close to the eye as to be invisible."

"'Pon my word, Hay," Stingo remarked, with admiration, "you see everything."

"What possessed you to think Durfey was the man?" Solomon added.

"Well, you see, I discovered that when he was — in retirement, he had read diligently many bound volumes of forgotten religious magazines. What he doesn't know about them isn't worth knowing. He understands the tearful story, and the thrilling story of the Inquisition. On the rack, the stake, the cord, the boot, the thumb-screw, and the Scavenger's Daughter, not to mention the torture of dropping water and of water poured into the human body, he is a past-master. The mechanism of the Iron Virgin has for Tom no secrets. He can recite you unctuous sermons by the yard: the pietistic-scientific paper about the stars and volcanoes, the moral of a great catastrophe, the biographies of popular divines flow from him as honeyed speech flowed from the lips of Nestor the aged sweet-tongued chief of Pylos" (here Stingo looked bored, but Solomon, catching the Homeric allusion, smiled gracious comprehension, whereat Sir

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Bradford made haste to correct his face); "in a word, Durfey is the man. I have tested him by long experiments. I have found him his vocation, always a gratifying thing."

Punchie's manner was an apotheosis of cynical impishness as he explained his cause. The Ishmaelite stood declared, pitiless, overmastering, absorbed in his scheme, that had its roots in hate. He was out to kill. This was his life, such life as now was left him, since the forces he was combating had robbed him of everything that had kept his humanity alive. Over him the child had no restraining power. He was fighting for her, to give her the best of everything, but fighting in his own way, untrammelled by a single misgiving. He had long outgrown any sentimental regard for what Barbara might have thought. He kept her memory apart from the things that now engrossed him. She had passed beyond the sphere of consciousness of him or of his actions. One day Oblivion would enwrap him too. He looked for no reunion. Therefore, till the night came, work! Circumstance had put weapons into his hand. He would use them to the best of his skill and let sentiment go hang!

His quiet insistency, his conviction, his fluent advocacy, wore down the cautious objections Solomon put forward. Stingo, the exuberant, was with him from the outset. When the conclave ended the directors had sanctioned, among other and minor adventures, the great and high emprise of *Sundays Well Spent*. But it would not be launched just yet. The *Torch*, although it had come to stay, would require much assiduous trimming, the rival to *Golightly's Scrap-Book* must be set well on the

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rails, together with one or two small chirping domestic journals to tickle the suburban matron and the flapper. Then, and not till then, would the world see a "live" Sunday magazine-journal, suitable for humble hearths. Nor would Stingo, Rheingold, and Hay stop there. But for the rest time must be their guide. One fact remained: nothing of Golightly's should go unassailed if money and brains could do it. And one day, it was not too much to dream, Golightly's would be outsung and outdone.

And thus secretly, but with untiring energy, backed by money in abundance and guided by one of the most alert and brilliant, if most perverted, brains in a world where brains are cash, the Eleventh Crusade marched on.

CHAPTER XIII

SOLOMON'S PLEASURES

THE three Crusaders parted at the door of their retreat, and each went his own way: Stingo back to the Alcides, to pass the time of day with other Strong Men, Punchie to pay his afternoon visit to the office—he always looked in for an hour about four, and then rested till seven—and Solomon to his pleasures. These last had lately taken a curious and interesting turn. Solomon, the man of experience, lived in a world of romance out of business hours. “Das Rheingold always has something on,” the City wags used to say, but, in spite of that, perhaps because of that, he remained stubbornly a bachelor. The City wags aforesaid closed one knowing eye, and with their customary austerity of phrase, hinted darkly at “little bits of alright.” What that signified only the initiated can guess. The phrase, slightly varied, is used sometimes to mean parcels of shares. As Solomon was a financier before anything, that was doubtless what the witty young bulls and bears intended to convey. But a mere layman cannot dogmatise on such cryptic matters.

Smiling softly to himself, Solomon turned his steps westward. It was a fine afternoon. A walk would do him good. As he went along he recalled the beginning of this adventure, if so mild an affair were worth the name. He laughed at himself for his interest in it, and

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wondered whether after all it might not be mere curiosity that had led him to pursue the game a single pace. He could not call it a passion, absurd! He had no designs, but he had a suspicion, a queer flattering suspicion. He would like to clear that up, one day. Perhaps he would. But he had a rather skilled fencer to deal with, a mistress of reserve who gave nothing away. Well, that only made the affair the more fascinating. Fascinating it was undeniably.

It had begun one afternoon a few months earlier, when Solomon was leaving the Queen's Hall at the close of one of his well-beloved Symphony Concerts. He was full-fed with music, rapt, benevolent, gently stimulated by an excerpt from Mozart's "Seraglio," which had set his thoughts jiggling to the tune of five hundred wives and seven hundred concubines. Solomon's thoughts were always on the grand scale. As he moved slowly with the crowd, he felt rather than saw that someone was looking at him. A stream of people from another gangway was gradually merging itself with the stream into which Solomon was wedged. Both streams would shortly flow united towards the exit. Yes, certainly someone had fixed him with a pair of very bright eyes. He met them casually. No, no one he knew. That, however, was no reason why he should not look again. And, besides, she was very pretty and, as far as he could see for the people, exquisitely *chic*. "But God bless my soul," said Solomon piously to himself, "surely I've seen her somewhere." But where, he could not recall. If she bowed or tried to speak he hoped to goodness he'd remember her name in time. Of all things Solomon hated to have to confess to a woman that he had for-

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gotten her. He usually got round the dilemma neatly and with credit.

The streams of people, driven by irresistible feminine impulse, the desire of tea, converged and mingled. Solomon was thrown shoulder to shoulder with the owner of the eyes. This time there could be no doubt. The lady smiled and bowed. Solomon played the like. Then his good angel, and in the end trustworthy, if occasionally slow, memory, came to his aid.

"How do you do, Miss Adderley? Delighted to meet you again."

The pressure had slackened as they reached the vestibule. Kitty now had room to hold out her hand. It was trembling a little; for success had just crowned a long and patient quest. That was exciting. Many concert tickets had gone to the purchase of this meeting. Several times she had seen Rheingold, but hitherto he had been too far away, or he had left before the end. Nothing could have been more suitable or delightful than this gradual drifting together on two tides of humanity. Kitty hailed it as a good omen.

"Excellent concert, wasn't it?" Solomon continued, making conversation. His large visions had become concentrated to a single point. He was at a loose end this afternoon. It was pleasant to meet this jolly little girl again. He remembered her vivacity, her quick enthusiasms. And she had improved in every way, quite the woman now, the schoolgirl all dismissed. There was, too, a certain firmness, an air of experience, he fancied. The experience was slightly puzzling, but very piquant, for the eyes for all their roguery and sharpness, were perfectly frank and innocent.

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"Charming concert," Kitty agreed. It cost her something to keep her composure. The moment was big with possibilities. What if he should drift away again with a smile and a bow? "Kreisler was superb; but don't you think that new thing of Rumpelstiltskin's was simply absurd?"

"I quite agree," said Solomon. "It oughtn't to have been in the programme. You're still as keen on music as ever, I see."

"It's half my life," said Kitty. "Well, here we are at the door at last. Good afternoon, Mr. Rheingold." She held out her hand.

"Oh, must you go, Miss Adderley? Won't you come and have a cup of tea somewhere?"

"I'd love to," said Kitty. "Thank you so much. I'm simply dying for tea. Doesn't listening to a lot of music make one awfully hungry?"

"It does, desperately," said Solomon, hailing a hansom, for the day of the taxi was not yet.

During that pleasant little *recontre* Solomon contrived to learn a good many interesting things about Kitty. He had a queer sensation when he discovered whose daughter she was. At their first meeting he had no idea who she was, and the matter had not concerned him. It was just a lucky chance that he remembered her name. His new knowledge set him thinking. He had heard that the sleeping partner in Golightly's had not cut up very well, as the vile saying is, and how Hiram had been bought out before the end, but nobody knew the real state of affairs. Solomon studied appearances. This young lady gave no hint of adversity. Well, perhaps she had means from some other quarter.

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He fished cunningly, and learned, to his amusement, that Kitty was a young woman about town, that wonderful growth of recent years, a blossom that left the young man about town very far behind for interest and romance. Solomon had always taken his good things where he found them. This adventure seemed to promise him a new plaything. He would play with it accordingly.

The wise man never hurried matters. He let acquaintance ripen gradually to friendship, and friendship to intimacy. Kitty was game. Discreet tea-parties *à deux* after concerts led to equally discreet lunches. From these at length it was but a step to discreet little dinners and an evening at the play. Supper, never perhaps quite discreet, though why it is difficult to say, was merely a natural consequence, and then one fine day he found himself a guest at Kitty's modest, but very pretty little flat.

Where she lived is no concern of ours. It was not in an expensive neighbourhood. But the lady herself never suggested the inexpensive, and once or twice she lunched Solomon sumptuously in public. She would take no denial. A threat that a refusal to let her return hospitality to the best of her poor ability would mean an end of everything, brought Solomon to reason. At the same time, it gave Kitty valuable insight. He didn't want to lose her. That was a point scored. She scored, too, in other ways; for Rheingold repaid those entertainments with interest. No man was ever further from meanness. Kitty's good time, it seemed, had come along with a copious splendour beyond her wildest dreams. And its wings were golden.

There was, however, one slight ruffle on the golden

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plumes. Amelia had found Kitty out. They met by chance at a quietly fashionable restaurant in Rider Street, where Kitty was lunching with Solomon. At a table not far away sat Amelia and Dorian. It was impossible not to speak. Kitty had to declare her address, and Amelia made haste to call. Amelia studied appearances and was disturbed. The place, though not ruinous, did not suggest a life commensurate with the income from a paltry capital safely invested. Mrs. Golightly hoped inwardly that all was right. She made so bold as to ask who Kitty's companion at lunch had been.

"A musical friend of mine," Kitty replied, naming no names. Amelia, as it happened, did not know Rheingold from Adam. Their paths had not crossed, and Solomon's portrait was not in the papers. He belonged to an exclusive world, to which the Golightly gold could not buy tickets of admittance. Had Kitty said "Rheingold," Amelia would have certainly asked, "not one of *the* Rheingolds?" and she would have questioned Pharie at bed-time. But Kitty's reticence implicitly dared Amelia to press her inquisition further. A musical friend might mean anything or nothing. Amelia hoped it meant nothing. But she would hope for the best, and keep her eye on the girl. She said nothing to Potiphar. For the first time she had not told Pharie she was lunching with Dorian — that is, with Mr. Stepney.

Per contra, and for reasons of her own, Kitty resolved to keep her eye on Amelia, and hoped for the worst. It might be useful, if the lady grew troublesome. There were more ways than one in which she might be troublesome. It was a curiously ramified world. Interests could cross at the most unexpected points. On this

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Kitty reflected sagely as she kissed Amelia good-bye and promised to call soon — oh, certainly soon — at Queen's Gate. She went, within a week, but Amelia was out. Then Amelia called again at the flat, and Kitty was out. After that there was silence for a time between them. Then Amelia, having a spare afternoon, and being somewhat consumed with curiosity, called again, inopportunistically as it chanced.

It did not altogether charm Solomon, at the end of his walk westward, to find that Kitty had a visitor. He preferred *tête-à-tête*. But his sense of the incongruous was gently tickled when he was introduced to Mrs. Golightly. He had heard a good deal about Potiphar's wife, much of it erroneous and maliciously exaggerated. Rheingold studied Amelia and made his own deductions. A nice woman, a charming woman, even a fine woman. Potiphar had done very well for himself there also. It was curiously piquant to reflect that he, Solomon Rheingold, now handing Mrs. Golightly her teacup, also represented a force that might sooner or later clip the fine feathers of this fine bird. Well, it was a funny world. Why go to the play? Far better to go out to tea, quietly, with original, independent young women in flats. Even on days when one did not get the original, independent young woman all to oneself, there were compensations.

Mr. Rheingold proceeded to make himself very agreeable. Amelia, of the other part, studied Solomon in her own way. His name had set her thinking. Well, if it should be one of *the* Rheingolds, and if his intentions were serious, how lucky for Kitty! It would be better, however, that the girl should be chaperoned. Amelia feared that the freedom of the flat might produce that

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easy familiarity which does not end in matrimony. She knew that a girl must be held in wise abeyance, if the man is to be spurred to the marrying point. She had never permitted Potiphar to cross the doorstep of her old lodgings, although he had often seen her just so far. But at the door she left him, with these advantageous results to her own fortunes. And for a time they had been more than advantageous. In fact, she had been perfectly happy, until — But no more of that. She looked at Mr. Rheingold and rather liked him. He did not seem like a "base deceiver." Oh, dear, that was a horrid phrase from a previous existence! Amelia thought she had outgrown such banalities. But there were times even yet when they ambushed her. The Universal of the Novelette had entered into Amelia too completely to be wholly cast out. Prayer and fasting might have done much; but with these Amelia had little traffic.

She could not break up Kitty's *ménage* and have her to live at Queen's Gate, but she could have the girl with her as much as possible. She would invite Mr. Rheingold, and make up little parties at restaurants and the play. She would not consult Potiphar. Lately Mrs. Golightly had been allowing herself rather more independence in her way of life. That was easier now that Osrice was settled at school, and Pharie seemed to be more absorbed in business than ever. He went out less at night, and came home tired in the late afternoon. The precise form of his weariness was sometimes rather trying, and Amelia was glad to escape. At the same time, she was as vigilant as she could be. She cajoled, advised, threatened, put the eminent specialist on the war-path once more, and salved her conscience. Nevertheless, she knew she was withdrawing herself. Well, that couldn't be helped.

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Poor Pharie was sometimes not altogether congenial society for a refined woman, when he came home tired. It could not be said that he was above himself exactly, but — he had lunched well. All this was very unpleasant. She had even confessed her fears to Dorian, who had promised, so far as his meagre opportunity served, to shepherd the chief. "There *might* be heart trouble, you know," said Amelia, "if he is not careful."

"It is little I can do, dear Mrs. Golightly," said Dorian, "but where I have a chance — you may depend upon me."

Amelia, therefore, hoped for the best, and took her extended liberty. It was a small, a legitimate compensation for increasing anxiety. It was a necessary relief from distinctly unpleasant experiences. Oh, poor, poor Pharie. It was so dreadful to see him like that. True, the lapses were not very frequent, but they were just frequent enough to be a trial. And lately, it seemed, they had increased slightly. She must keep a diary, a little thing with a silver lock and key. "Pharie tired," "Pharie very tired." The recurrence of such entries would be a good guide. Yes, she would do her duty as a wife. It was comforting to have the assurance of Dorian's help. His quick understanding and sympathy gave her wonderful support.

Such was the curious undercurrent of thought underlying the light lip-superficiality of the talk at Kitty's flat that afternoon. As for Kitty herself, she concealed annoyance with Amelia behind a voluble vivacity. Solomon thought he had never seen the girl so charming. He played up to her bravely, and Amelia grew more and more persuaded that here was the right man, that

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is, if he was all right. It would be such a satisfaction to see Kitty well settled. Amelia had never been quite easy in her mind about the buying-out of Hiram. She was superstitious, and feared that Golightly's might one day suffer for that piece of sharp practice.

At length Amelia rose. "I'd be so charmed if you'd come to see me one day, Mr. Rheingold," she said, as she shook hands.

"Thank you very much; I'll come with pleasure," Solomon replied, intending to do no such thing. He had studied Amelia during the last three-quarters of an hour, and he had seen a fluttering hen-like attitude towards Kitty which did not at all coincide with his views for that young lady's future. Nor did the prospect of closer acquaintance with the House of Golightly altogether appeal to him.

"Thursday is my day," Amelia continued graciously. "Don't forget. And Kitty, my dear, remember my Thursdays too. You have not been to see me for an age, naughty girl."

"Very naughty, I know," said Kitty, "but I'll remember." She allowed herself to be kissed. Amelia, regretting that she must leave Solomon and Kitty *tête-à-tête*, prolonged her departure with odds and ends of small talk. But Mr. Rheingold made no move; foiled, Amelia drifted to the door. She would have sat Solomon out, but she had an engagement with her dressmaker. It was decidedly important. If she were not fitted to-day, she might not get her frock in time.

As soon as the door closed, Kitty kissed her hand ironically towards it.

"A visitation," she remarked, with a sly laugh to Solomon.

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"A dragon of Propriety," remarked the wise man, taking his cue.

"M'm," Kitty replied, pouting her lips. "Perhaps, I'm not sure. But she doesn't like my living alone."

"How very old-fashioned!"

"Very. But do you know, Mr. Rheingold, I'm not certain that Mrs. Golightly's really so old-fashioned, after all. In fact, in some ways she's quite up-to-date. She can follow her own inclinations when it suits her."

"So do we all, my dear Kitty."

"Don't call me Kitty, please. I don't call you Solomon."

"But Solomon's not a pretty name."

"Neither is Kitty, neither is Adderley, I hate it; neither, for that matter, is Rheingold, but there's no choice. Let it be 'Miss Adderley,' please, and 'Mr. Rheingold.' More would be the beginning of laxity." She made a grimace very provoking in its demure insincerity.

"Very well then, Miss Adderley. I apologise for the inadvertent Kitty."

"It wasn't inadvertent. However, you had to say something. I forgive you."

Solomon heaved a sigh of mock relief. "Thank heaven for that," he exclaimed, fervently. Kitty beamed. He certainly knew how to play the game. Had he been serious, she would have shut the door on him at once and turned elsewhere. But in his superficial gaiety she read safety. He was a good comrade on the light road they both enjoyed following. Time enough for him to be serious later. She could lead him to that when she chose. But she was young, and liberty had its own

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fascinations. She never distrusted her power to keep Solomon dancing like a useful Jumping-Jack until the day came for him to moderate his antics to a soberer fling. By that time Kitty would have had her own fling, and a dwindling exchequer would call for other methods. But as far as it had gone the game was pleasant and worth the candle. As yet the candle was burning at one end only. Like King Alfred, she had divided it with notches, marking time. Kitty was in no hurry. She had allowed herself ample measure. Life was only beginning. Already she had begun to pick up interesting friends, some of them adventurers like herself, others of more assured position. She was penetrating a curious world of quasi-intellect, emotion, and refined materialism, a world that skirts the fringes of aristocracy—no, fringes the skirts would describe it better. There is a good deal of actual and somewhat desperate clinging to the skirts of aristocracy in that strange welter of endless whirl and snatching at bubbles into which Miss Kitty Adderley had now set one dancing foot.

"Well, little woman," said Solomon at length, taking up his hat, "when have you a spare evening for an old man?"

"Let me see," said Kitty cautiously, as she went to her bureau and consulted a little engagement book, "Wednesday, no; Thursday, no; Friday, no; Saturday, yes. How about Saturday?"

"All right. I'll come along and pick you up at half-past seven."

"Do," said Kitty. "I shall have a new frock, a beauty."

CHAPTER XIV

DORIAN RECEIVES AND GIVES

AMELIA, it has been hinted, was allowing herself an extended liberty. To liberty, or perhaps vagrancy, of thought she had yielded long ago; liberty of action came by degrees as a natural consequence. It was the easier, latterly, because of certain sophistries, arising from the clouds, the little clouds that now hung about her life. They were small, to be sure, as yet, but sufficiently threatening to drive her to take shelter where she could. Repulsions, faint at first, but growing gradually more insistent, were alienating her from her husband. Pharie, poor man, was of the earth, earthy. Amelia was conscious of need, spiritual need, she called it, that Potiphar could not supply. He was still kindly, indulgent, dotingly affectionate—that was the worst of it—but withal gross.

She faced the word firmly, where once she had shrunk from it. If she were to remain alive, to keep herself fit and braced for the struggle that certainly lay ahead, the struggle with Lower Powers that were surely laying hold of Potiphar, she must have support, distraction, something to keep her ideals alive, otherwise she would sink into morbidity. Yes, friendship with a person of understanding was a very precious thing, a gift to thank Heaven for. Amelia had missed the greatest thing in life, the dreams of her romantic girlhood would remain

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for ever unrealised, but in a sense she had found compensation. It would be a very harsh code that would refuse her a small reparation of great loss. Tush, such scruples were quite old-fashioned. The world had moved on to better things. *Honi soit qui mal y pense!* Potiphar, at any rate, good easy man, engrossed with his business and his pleasures, thought no evil. Consequently to him no evil should arise. Amelia felt she could promise that.

They were very discreet, she and her young man. If the world, or certain odd corners of it, had lifted an amused eyebrow, well, such things were of everyday occurrence. No doubt it was only pastime with good company. So discreet were they, that as yet no one had said, "Poor Potiphar." Mrs. Golightly, be it remembered, had only said, "Poor Pharie," a very different thing, and she had said it below her breath, if, indeed, the words had been audible at all, which is very doubtful. As for her Paladin, he had ceased to ask himself questions. He had a delightful distraction amid a too strenuous life, that was all. She was his senior, it was true, but they were both just at the age when the gap in years is least apparent and most easily bridged, when the woman has kept her youth successfully, or has, at least, known how to keep the signs of middle age in abeyance, without artifice. Amelia combined all the graciousness of the young woman with the fuller charms of maturity. And her youthfulness was no grotesque survival of mere girlishness, that last and ghastliest betrayal of woman at a certain age. Amelia kept herself well in hand. She knew she had reached the period when woman, if she be fortunate, is the most fascinating, even

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brain-turning. She took the good things the year had given her of physical beauty without any foolish harking back to earlier days, except perhaps in the indulgence of romantic dreams that rightly belonged to the epoch of the Duchesses. But that indulgence found no expression in her manner. "Mrs. Golightly was a deuced fine woman," said the old men; the young said, "jolly fine." No one would have thought of her as "well-preserved." Therein was comprehended the whole matter.

Time had been when Amelia wondered why Dorian did not get married, and in earlier days she had even given him good advice on the subject. But wonder and good advice had alike ceased long ago. Amelia knew now; and the knowledge gave her an extraordinary thrill of perverse pleasure. It also helped to keep her young and — braced to meet possible trial. That was the great thing.

She owed Dorian much: especially for his leading about Osric. The boy had quite settled down to school-life, and seemed to be enjoying it. Pharie was a little hard, she thought, on the question of pocket-money, but Amelia contrived privately to make that all right for her idol. He had to keep his footing with his fellows. He seemed to do that pretty well, in every way. After the first trials were over, he seemed to take kindly enough to exile from apron-strings. He was getting on, too; his reports said that he "showed real ability, if perhaps a little wanting in application." Potiphar, during one vacation, pointed morals from the want of application. Amelia, tremulously defensive, recalled the testimony to "real ability." But Osric was doing creditably enough in games, it seemed, and every holiday saw him taller and more supple. He kept and improved his good looks,

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He had quite the public-school manner now, his mother thought. Amelia hoped to see him in the Eleven or the boat one day. His great chum, by a happy chance, was Welshpoole. Elizabeth Welshpoole and Amelia compared notes, fondly maternal, based on entire and comfortable ignorance of the character of their sons, their pursuits and confidences. And Amelia had a new dream, not unconnected with Welshpoole's sister, Hilda Thlangothlen. There had been summer days at Lord's and high days at school, when Amelia had seen things. Of course, it was absurd, they were mere children; still the fancy came along pleasantly. Every pleasant fancy was doubly precious nowadays.

Doubly precious, yes; for the years that saw Osric's growth towards paternally desired manhood had been years of growing stress to the House of Golightly. They had told on Potiphar, they had told also on Dorian. But while the stress seemed to have unstrung the older man, it had left the younger keener, more hard-bitten, more than ever, Amelia thought, like a Paladin of romance. She now saw in Stepney some likeness to the soldier class. Dorian had the look of one who has seen campaigns, always a precious thing in the eyes of woman.

Campaigns there had been certainly, and still were and would be; for now the enterprise of Stingo, Rheingold, and Hay had taken deep root, and was throwing its branches as wide as that of Golightly. It had to be watched day and night, if Golightly's was to hold its own. Golightly's was still paramount, but the point had now been reached when its chiefs had to face the question, "for how long?" They were clever enough in all conscience, but Hay was just the least bit cleverer all

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along the line, and that made the difference. For the public had begun to find it out. No, the public had not found it out, in the sense that it was conscious of the precise respect in which the *Torch* and Allied Journals was cleverer. For the fish cannot appraise the relative skill of two anglers who seek its blood. It can only jump at the more tempting bait.

Golightly's tied and retied their flies, and strained to achieve more and more cunning in their cast. But still the enemy went one better. It was exasperating, ominous.

Potiphar, not the man he was, began to yield to panic, which showed itself at the Board; he grew suspicious, restless, irritable. He held feverish inquests into the working of departments, and talked of changes, of dismissals. Dorian resisted, reasoned, and for a time evaded a stampede. Lucky that Potiphar had made him a Director when the thing was floated. Otherwise he could hardly have gone on. But his voice at the Board was weighty.

"We are holding our own," he urged. "There is nothing as yet to make the shareholders grumble. Don't disorganise the machinery. It is good. Competition was inevitable. For a long time we had the field to ourselves, and that has puffed us up. We couldn't hope to remain always unattacked. Let us meet attack calmly. Golightly's is strong enough and sound enough to weather the storm. But, gentlemen, if we start rebuilding the ship in mid-ocean——"

He paused and waved his hands. The Board grunted approval. Potiphar sat sullen. He had never been defeated before.

Later in the evening he came into Dorian's room. It

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was unusual now for Potiphar to be seen at the office after four o'clock.

A rumour ran through the sub-editor's room.

"Old Magnum Opum's turned up."

"Tight?"

"Not exactly tight, but, well ——"

"A giant refreshed ——?"

"Precisely — oh, damn that telephone — He's with Stepney now."

"Wonder what's up?"

"Sudden or vital energy, I suppose, that's all."

The noses went into the flimsy again.

Dorian looked up surprised as his chief came in.

"Evenin', Stepney."

Potiphar sat down heavily. His legs were thrust out straight in front of him, his heels rested on the floor, his toes stuck up aggressively. There was a lack of control. He leaned forward, uncomfortably. He was growing obese.

"I've been thinking seriously," he began, "over the Board Meeting to-day. I didn't like your forwardness. You may be a Director, but you're still the servant of the comp'ny and airs are out o' place. You gave yourself airs." Potiphar wagged a fat finger. "It won't do, Stepney. T'won' do, d'ye hear. I'm captain of this ship. I'm sorry, but duty's duty, and I'll have no mutiny. I'm resolved. As Managing D'rector, without reference to the Board, I can make changes in the staff. I'm sorry, very sorry, but my duty's to give you notice."

Dorian looked up quietly. Yes, he might reason; his man was more sullenly angry than tipsy. "I fear you're

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not aware, Mr. Golightly, of the extent of my holdings in this concern?"

"Aware. Of course I'm aware. Bare director's qualification. Gave it you myself. Aware!"

"Do you remember some time ago wondering who that Thomas Bates was, who'd been buying very largely for a while back?"

"Perfectly. He's the biggest holder, outside myself and Tregarthen and old Anderson."

"He now holds more than any of these except yourself. Your information is scarcely up to date."

"Well, and if not, what then?"

"Thomas Bates is only the agent for your humble servant. I myself next to you have now the biggest interest in Golightly's. I've been well paid all these years: I've lived quietly, I've made money in other ventures, lucky ventures, and I've put the bulk of it gradually and secretly into this place. What price notice, Mr. Golightly?"

Golightly pulled himself together, with the face of one who has had a blow and will not own it. He surged up from his seat and grasped his hat and umbrella in his left hand.

He held out his right. Stepney took it graciously enough.

"Good night, Dorian," said Mr. Potiphar Golightly.

END OF BOOK THE FIRST

BOOK II
THE MIDDLE

CHAPTER I

THE HAND OF CHANGE

POTIPHAR, aged considerably and somewhat shaken, but still, as he said, "game," surveyed the years that had elapsed since the night when he discovered that Dorian Stepney had the right to speak with authority at the council board of Golightly's Limited. He looked back upon years of storm and stress, years of anxiety and fierce struggle during which he had recognised, with an inward grudge, that but for Dorian, the House, that sacred work of his hands, might have tottered to its foundations. For the enemy had been sleepless, fertile in strategy and meeting every counter-move and fresh enterprise of Golightly's with diabolical cunning. Still, however, they were holding their own. There had been luck. War had flamed across a southern continent, bringing paradoxical prosperity to such as sold news, and Golightly's had risen gloriously to the occasion. In those years of combat the House had paid an increased dividend. That was pleasing, but the *Torch* and Allied Journals, now also a public concern, had paid more. Exasperating; all the same, his own shareholders had been content. They had not troubled to draw contrasts. But with the return of Peace, and the vanishing of artificial stimulus, what would happen? Already profits had begun to decline. Potiphar had doubts that he would not acknowledge to himself.

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It was upon a new world that he looked out. The great Edwardian Era had opened with its strange and brilliant promise. Times were changing: the face of London was being gradually transformed, the very traffic in her streets was unfamiliar. The King had vowed to make the motor-car a necessity for every English gentleman before the reign should be much older, and the royal will found quick response. Fashion issued her fiat and the thing was done.. A host of engineers wrestled with the secrets of the new power, and every day saw it leap further forward towards perfection. Men and women, particularly women, discovered the intoxication of speed, to which Henley consecrated almost the last effort of his genius. Society, already restless enough, became frankly nomadic. The old highways, silent for eighty years, once more bustled with runners to and fro; but the cheerful beat of horse-hoofs had given place to the throb of cylinders, and the sportsman-like tarantara of the guard's horn, that friendly and hospitable thing, was now parodied by the dull and menacing grunt of the roadhog, bidding pedestrian mankind beware of sudden death. A new interest had evoked a new vocabulary; the words *garage*, spark-plug, carburetter, control (in a special sense), and all their kindred, appeared, ugly excrescences upon the language. Less than ever men remained at home, or cared to cultivate the pleasures of the fireside. Fewer pictures were bought and fewer books. The voice of the painter and the writer was raised in fruitless lamentation for an occupation gone. But the Age took no heed of such superfluities and whirled on to new conquests, until one day it should spurn the ground, take wings and fly. Icarus

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would return, leading an eager band of Icaridæ ready to be dashed to pieces for their ambition. But at their fall, new Icaridæ would spring aloft, careless of life, careful only of the cause, to darken the light of the free heavens. And before that onset, Athené, Queen of the Air, goddess of ancient wisdom, veiled her face and withdrew her favour from men.

On the beginnings of this mad turmoil Potiphar looked forth with uncertain eyes, telling himself that he must march with the times. But his knapsack was growing heavy; already, although he would not acknowledge it, he knew himself to be something of an old campaigner. Had he allowed the thought to find expression he would have spoken in terms of his craft, and the word would have been "back-number." The passing away of the Victorian Era had given Potiphar a shock. It had shown him the End, and that was uncomfortable. But he was still game. Also, he was still well supported, but he wished now, more ardently than ever, for the support of his own flesh and blood. He could not tell whether that dream would be realised.

He could not understand Osric. There was a great deal that was promising and amiable about the boy, but these last years at school had not been so reassuring as the start. Very soon now Osric must go up to Oxford, and then, in another three years' time, Golightly's would take the young man to its capacious bosom. If only he saw more chance of making the boy a man of business! There was the rub! For a time Potiphar had hoped rosy things. Osric had played games without disgrace, if without the last distinction coveted by Amelia, his reports had been quite satisfactory, except in

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arithmetic; but latterly — well, Potiphar did not know what to think. The boy was taking up his head with all kinds of unpractical nonsense. He devoured French novels, he “messed about,” as his father put it, with little books of poetry. Without having made any very great mark in his form, Osric posed as a scholar, or at least a youth of taste. He had some aptitude for Greek, however, and really knew something about it outside his routine work, although it is hard to say whether his private studies would have greatly charmed the guardians of that place where grateful science still adores her Henry’s Holy Shade.

Potiphar, less enlightened, accounted the whole thing trash, and said so to Amelia, during Osric’s last vacation.

“Osric is becoming a very *cultivated* young man,” Amelia corrected. “He and Welshpoole are the centre of a most *intellectual* set. It is nice that they’ll be together at Oxford.”

“Confound that Welshpoole!” Potiphar retorted, with savage conviction. “He does the boy no good, I’ll be bound. I hate him somehow, without knowing why.”

“Oh, hush, Pharie. Welshpoole’s a charming fellow.”

“When I was a lad, young chaps didn’t bother about being ‘charming.’ I don’t like Welshpoole about the house. How long’s he staying?”

“Over the next week-end.”

“Umph! Where are the boys to-night?”

“They said they were going to some play or other, I forget which.”

“Did you tell them to come in at a decent hour? I’m not a Puritan, but I don’t like mere youngsters knocking about town towards the small hours ——”

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"Oh, Osric's too level-headed to run into any scrape; and, Pharie, they're University *men* now almost, or will be in a month or two. You used to laugh at me for 'apron-strings.' Fortunately *I* have a sense of proportion."

"Oh, I suppose I'm only a poor old ignorant, dunder-headed fool! Look here, Amelia, that a boy of ours is becoming a bit of a snob and a high-falutin donkey, and it's all Welshpoole's fault. But you're so proud of his chumming-up with a pauper peer — whom *we* help to keep, mark you! — that you see no ill in the fellow."

"I will not hear you call our child or his friend names, Pharie. Osric's a dear, clever boy, and you'll be proud of him one day."

"I'm sure I hope so," Potiphar muttered. "By the way, Amelia, I find, after all, I don't dine out to-night. I'll have something at home for once in a way. Shall you be in?"

"So sorry, Pharie, I'm dining out — with friends."

"Can't you put them off, old girl? It's ages since we had an evening at 'ome together." He drew near and tried to put his arm round her, but Amelia eluded him. Potiphar slunk away abashed. He hardly knew what to make of it all, Amelia had grown that hoity-toity. Once she had told him that any display of affection between married people was "middle-class."

"Well, so are we," said Potiphar. "There or thereabouts, I suppose. I was lower middle-class once. *You* weren't, my dear, bein' always quite the lady."

"I'm sure I hope so," Amelia had shrugged, with

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inward longing unspeakable that her husband could be vulgarly described as "quite the gentleman." Even that limited credential would be something. More and more did poor Pharie jar upon her. He had reverted lately, and Amelia had developed "nerves." So she said at least, but as yet they had not begun to ruffle her placid beauty. "Amelia Golightly is a miracle," Lady Welshpoole said, with envy; adding, "I wonder how she does it? Fearfully well-preserved women at her age always remind me of a grotesque too-old baby. But Amelia's fresh and natural still. I wonder what beauty-woman she goes to?"

In truth, Amelia went nowhere for treatment. She had the supreme gift of setting worry aside. Her selfishness was all-sufficing, her self-deception nothing short of fine art. And now at forty-two she could still face her mirror without reluctance. Romance, too, had helped her. She still lived secretly in the old world of Healthy Tales for Young Ladies, and Prince Charming was not a mere figment of the imagination. How amusing, how piquant that they had never been found out. How near they felt to each other now in every way. He was thirty-seven. The five years' difference did not matter. She refused to look ten years ahead. How faithful he had been, never seeming to care for anything but their ideal friendship! And it had been perfectly ideal, perfectly *sans peur et sans reproche*. Amelia's heart glowed; she had no reason for self-reproach. Yes, this had kept her young. It was the sovereign elixir of life. Cosmetics — poor Elizabeth Welshpoole! — were nowhere.

Such was the undercurrent of Amelia's thoughts as

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her car bore her, with a soft, and soothing purr, towards her dinner—"with friends."

Pharie had ceased to ask questions since the day when she had quelled him with—"People in *high* life don't *do* that sort of thing nowadays."

Potiphar was proud that his Amelia should be a great lady. No doubt his prejudices were a bit old-fashioned. Yes, he must march with the times. She knew best; she was always a bit better than he was. Her father had been a prosperous auctioneer, who came to grief and departed this life heart-broken, but not before he had given the girl a good education as the times and the educational ideals of Hornsey went. Amelia had been "finished" by a year at school in Paris. Her French, quite good French, had helped her in Society. Her education had been her mainstay when, penniless and friendless, she pitched her virgin tent in Bloomsbury and began to write of Duchesses as one to the manner born. Thence a slender living, thence Potiphar and new vistas, thence, in the fullness of time, Amelia Golightly in her ultimate efflorescence. And who should say it was not lovely and of good report?

It was Saturday evening. Potiphar, taking his after-dinner peg in the library, indulged a pardonably human satisfaction that there was no wifely restraint upon his tumbler to-night. Latterly, however, with Amelia so much out on her own account, his freedom had not been greatly restricted. Quite right! A man must have something to warm the cockles of his heart, and now that he could hardly say that he had a wife—although that was perhaps unavoidable; for one must

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study the inclinations of a refined woman — well, what did the old song say:

Ho, ho, ho! You and me,
Little brown jug,
How I love thee!

Potiphar crooned the words. There was something in that. He looked round his barren splendours, and longed for the merry old days when he was a jovial young reporter, whose careful father had compelled him to sign the pledge. Ah, those were the days of beer and skittles. Potiphar had enjoyed both; for a pledge taken under compulsion is null and void. Would he have been happier if he had married Gracie, poor little woman? Well, she was doomed. He wouldn't have had her long. That incident with its complement was better closed. And closed it was effectively. He had done his duty. Sometimes, lately, he had been tempted to ask his lawyer a question. But no; better not. It must be that he was getting on in years, harking back like this to old times — old follies. Quick, the spade; and hap them up again!

He turned round in his chair and smiled at his comforter, that winked an amber eye at him from the cut crystal. The days of genial rough and tumble pots o' beer were long gone by. He took up the evening paper. Election Intelligence. What was this? "We understand that Mr. J. A. Hay, managing director of the *Torch* and Allied Journals, is to stand as an Independent Candidate for the South Plimsoll Division."

"Good Lord!" said Potiphar.

He got up and went to the telephone. After the game

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of cross-purposes and one "wrong number," he asked:

"Is Mr. Step — Hey, oh, that you, Dorian? Do you see you'll have a second opponent? Oh, you've seen it. Yes, rum start. You mustn't get beaten. It would be a nasty blow to our presteege. No fear, you say. Don't be too cock-a-hoop, my friend. Better go down at once — we'll rub along somehow without you — yes, go down, live in the place, nurse it, pamper it, do everything the Law allows, and as much more as you can with safety. Safe Liberal seat, you say. Nonsense! Hay's Independent dodge will give him a pull. He'll play up to the Labour vote and take that away from you. The *Torch's* independence has just been cunningly disguised Socialism all along. It's devilish cute. He's not in to win, but he's in to keep you out. It's a double smack for the *Beacon*. You defeated and the Conservative in! Oh, damn! oh, damn! Well, take my tip. Think it over. Good night."

"They harry us all along the line," Potiphar muttered, sinking into his chair again. He took up the paper once more, and read a neat paragraph recounting without party bias the manifold energies of Mr. J. A. Hay, "one of the foremost of our new school of newspaper pioneers."

"The little upstart!" said Potiphar bitterly, mixing another peg, just one. A man needed that after such a nasty turn. "However, Hay doesn't realise how much fight there is in old Golightly's yet. If only we could blacken him somehow, but he's so damned immaculate. Nobody has a word against him. Lives like a monk, they say. No interest but his work and his brat. Still, you never know. A private detective might find out

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something interesting and queer." Potiphar nursed the idea until creature comforts somewhat assuaging his bitterness, sent him to sleep; open-mouthed, stertorous, obese, unprepossessing. His eye-glasses slipped and hung from his nose at a grotesque angle. He was not a sight for irreverence, especially youthful irreverence.

But, as Fate would have it, youthful irreverence was not to be denied the spectacle.

Just after midnight there was a sound of boyish laughter in the hall. The door was flung open and two strayed revellers burst in, flushed, excited, a little disordered by the young joys of a new independence, an excursion into the marvels of a lamp-lit London that seems made for youth.

"Hullo! here's the dad!" Osric cried. Potiphar did not awake.

He and Welshpoole passed round to the front of Golightly's chair. They were a curious contrast, Osric's fair innocence half belied the look of perverse knowledge that lurked in his eyes. Welshpoole was darker, equally good-looking, equally perverse, a little taller, with a greater suggestion of strength carried off with polite insolence, a thing that Osric had never quite learned, never would learn in the Welshpoole perfection. It was easy to see which of the two boys ruled the other.

Osric, on a fuller view of his father, drew back embarrassed. Welshpoole's grimace at the slumberer hurt him. He tried to say something in protest, but the words would not come. He was too weak to resist his ruler, who stood enjoying the spectacle without shame.

"Come on to bed, Welsh," Osric managed to say at last. "I'm beastly tired."

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Welshpoole kissed his hand to the sleeper, and followed his follower out of the room.

Osric longed to tell his noble friend that he was a cad, but he had inherited from Amelia a respect for aristocracy that held him tongue-tied. Shame at his unmanly silence kept him awake for a time, in vague discomfort. He had never seen the governor so overcome, and he was a dear old boy, for all his limitations. He really almost hated Welshpoole for guying him. He would tell him so to-morrow. With that resolution he found comfort and fell asleep; but to-morrow, Welshpoole, the debonair, the amusing, the all-compelling, the fascinating instructor in things that are not convenient, went unadmonished.

And really, you know, the old boy was rather a sight, and Welshpoole had such a delicious sense of humour. He was hardly to blame.

What a high old time he and Welshpoole would have at Craven!

CHAPTER II

JUVENTUS REDUX

CURBED or thwarted, the human spirit, in its inevitable search for solace, fastens itself to a choice not always the most discriminating. According to the individual temperament the search for consolation and support may resolve itself into a mere empty desire for distraction, in which case it catches at the nearest and often most foolish means; or it may, in natures of juster balance, continue the quest with fastidious dissatisfaction, until it is crowned by an ideal or overwhelmed in despair. To Amelia Golightly none of these hard and fast rules exactly applied. She had had no need to search: for she had found what she wanted even before her need was realised. The process had been so gradual, so insidious, that she hardly knew for how much it counted in her life. She would not admit to herself that it was a passion: rather was it a charming pastime, something that helped her to forget now and then the hollowness, the disappointment, she had almost said the disgust, that beset her with increasing force. Surely, then, it was worth having, and it was all so perfectly innocent. The world, the wider, wiser, more tolerant world of to-day, had room for such friendships. She concerned herself little with questions of women's emancipation, but here at least was a little opportunity of freedom that seemed to her more vital, more precious,

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more truly fruitful of amelioration, than any small and unsuitable strivings after a voice in public affairs. She reflected, as she drove home that Saturday evening, that before long she might have all the voice she wanted, all that any woman need want in public affairs, if Dorian was to win his election.

She had enjoyed an exciting evening, all the more piquant that she had actually heard her husband's news in his own proper voice. Her host, after a moment's listening at the telephone, had, with a whimsical smile, signed to her to take up the second ear-piece.

When Potiphar, having at last blown himself out, had rung off, Dorian and Amelia faced each other. In their eyes they read many things. Those little stolen *tête-à-tête* dinners at Stepney's flat in Queen Anne's Mansions were growing more frequent; they were a delightful interlude, nothing more, but still precious. Very little separated them from being a necessity of life; that is, of life lived on a higher plane than Queen's Gate permitted. To-night's meeting had been pleasant beyond the common for both. The consciousness that they held themselves in restraint, the assurance that they would always observe the limits of prudence, gave them a perverse satisfaction. It heightened their friendship with a fine touch of austerity, of sacrifice. To Dorian in particular this pastime lent a fascinating stimulus. His heart beat tumultuously when Amelia came into his presence. He was conscious of a touch of sentimental hopelessness, of pathos, that stirred him to the depths of his being, as he conceived them. He worshipped Amelia with his eyes, he doted on her perfections.

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Naturally a temperate man in all things, Dorian had found in this adoration his one debauch. For to all severely temperate men some debauch is necessary. Your fanatic abstainer from wine is usually an incurable glutton for sweetmeats. Expel nature with a pitchfork and she returns through the window in some grotesque disguise. Fortunate is he to whom she reappears only in grotesque trappings. Ten chances to one she will show him a face perverted and debased, yet of a fascination to lure him Hellwards.

"You will go at once to South Plimsoll," Amelia said. "You must not be beaten."

Dorian shrugged his shoulders.

"It's difficult," he replied. "There may not be an election for ages. Old Brindleham may last a long time yet. I've plenty of time, and a good agent. I don't see how I can be spared, especially at present."

"Golightly's can surely look after itself for a bit. You're too conceited. No man is indispensable, and a little slackening wouldn't be so bad as a public defeat that was a victory for Hay. Do go down, Dorian, and nurse the place. Pharie's quite right. You know he'll support you through thick and thin, and you needn't bother about money, I'm sure. There are other ways of helping you too. Nowadays women can do a lot in these matters."

Dorian looked up quickly.

"Yes, I mean it," Amelia answered his look, "and it will be a delightful amusement for me. It will help me to forget" (she sighed), "and it will be helping a friend. Could a woman ask greater happiness?"

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Dorian pressed her hand for an instant. "Dear woman," he said, with feeling he believed to be quite real. "But isn't it rather impossible?"

"You distrust me, then?" Amelia, piqued, drew away her hand.

"No, a thousand times no. But in your generosity have you not forgotten the difficulties? At an election time it would be all right, but long beforehand, and with your humble servant constantly at South Plimsoll — you understand ——?"

Amelia frowned; charmingly, Dorian thought. Oh, she was adorable in every mood!

"Bother Mrs. Grundy!" she exclaimed, "whose I am and whom I serve. Well, we must consider. There are ways, and ways. We must consider — how to cheat Mrs. Grundy. Up to the present, we've done so, in a small way, very tolerably well, *ne c'est pas?*"

"Above all, in politics, it is necessary to appease Mrs. Grundy," Dorian said, evading the direct question. He had had a little shock. That last remark of Amelia's betrayed a self-consciousness that had hitherto been quite absent from their counsels. Or he had not noticed it. This note of defiance was new. What did it portend? Was Amelia, then, farther along the road they must never tread than he himself? Was this a challenge? Had he been blind, a laggard where he might have been a conqueror? He had set up Amelia as an idol inviolate. He worshipped that inviolability, with vague and unconfessed longings that it were otherwise. Yet it called for daily sacrifice of self, and surely that was an ennobling thing. And this impious desire, repressed, gave him, for recompense, a luxury of sensation. It lifted him

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to another plane. He forgot the sordid (yes, sordid) details of his daily life. Once more, in thought, if not in act, he was a poet, as he had been long before the vortex caught him. Lately, he had actually taken to reading Baudelaire again. He had almost regained the creative faculty. One touch more and he knew he would find his voice again. It gave him back his youth. Could it be, then, that Amelia had outrun him—but the very thought was an impiety. He put it aside strenuously, and in the act discovered a strange new thrill.

Amelia was sitting silent in the corner of the deep window-seat. The curtains were drawn back, as she always would have them on these evenings, for the view from Dorian's rooms at night revealed a city of enchantment.

"Switch off the light, Dorian, do, and let me enjoy my fairyland."

He obeyed.

"Now sit down in that other corner and don't speak. Just look at London with me, and listen to what it says."

Oh, she was a friend worth having, this woman! How she had developed in his hands! In these years of faithful comradeship he had rallied a lost self for her sake, he had fed her imagination, leading her along paths of intellectual culture of which Amelia Jelks had never dreamed. She had responded wonderfully, almost too wonderfully. But for her the old Dorian Stepney would now lie dead and buried on the Field of the Lust of Gold. But she had rescued him. On nights like this he could say that he possessed his soul.

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Far below them St. James's Park lay most deeply, darkly, beautifully blue; the soft outlines of the trees, hardly distinguishable from the mass, made it seem like some resting cloud. Nearer, the lights of Birdcage Walk twinkled in long perspective towards Westminster until they lost themselves in the luminous haze that overhung Broad Sanctuary. Far away to the north-east, on what seemed, by the illusion of distance and dim atmosphere, a surprising height, the glow of Piccadilly sprang heavenwards with its suggestion of earthly paradox; beyond, the fainter glow of Leicester Square took up the tale of London's mad swirling dance of nightly pleasure. But the deep spaces of the Park, darkling, spoke only of peaceful shelter for shy amoretts beneath the trees.

... Nunc et campus et arææ
Lenesque sub noctem susurri
Composita repetantur hora.

"What is that you are crooning to yourself?"

Dorian started. He had not known that he had thought aloud.

"Only some old nonsense of Horace's, suggested by the Park and its shadows."

"Tell me what it means?"

A strange whim seized him. Could he still translate, *impromptu*, into English verse? Once upon a time he had been ready enough, and with neat things, too. For a moment he wrestled with the lines, weaving in part of the context. Then he began in a quiet voice:

"Now in the world's wide open spaces, boy,
Exult thy fill and prove thy youthful power:

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Learn what a maid's low whisper holds of joy,
When twilight falls upon the trysted hour.

"That's rather bald and rather free, but it's got the idea more or less."

"I think the lines are quite charming. Did you make them off-hand?"

Dorian nodded, a little shamefaced.

"You must write them down for me. I like:

When twilight falls upon the trysted hour

and I quite see how your wonderful view suggested them to you. I wonder why the deep open spaces of the Park at night should be so magical, and why they always seem inseparable from just that whispering your verses speak of? Horace must have known a lot."

"He did. He knew life and he knew love; the love not very exalted perhaps, but sufficient to inspire immortal lines."

"It's curious, isn't it, that so many of the sweetest and most charmingly memorable things should have sprung from a love that was — well, not very exalted — while ——?"

"While the poetry of exalted passion is sometimes a little tedious. Yes," Dorian intervened, reading Amelia's thought.

"How clever of you to know what I was thinking; only I couldn't quite say it, not at least so well as you. Oh, I could look at your view all night! Do you know, I think it spoke to you quite prettily. London is such a dear, delightful, surprising, perverse monster, and in the dark, what things does he not say to us ——?"

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"Light, vain, frivolous, fascinating things," Dorian went on, taking up Amelia's lyric—he had not known that she could be lyrical: it was a new phase—"things quite contrary to the deep brood of his everyday voice. But we must not listen——"

"No, Dorian, we must not listen. But they are pleasant to hear, all the same."

"How can you hear without listening?"

"Easily, if you are a woman. But the worst of it is that hearing at last leads to listening——"

"And then——?"

"Ah! Don't ask me," Amelia protested, ending her sigh. "No, *we*, at any rate, must not listen. . . . And yet——" she added. "Why not?"

To that question neither of them could have found an answer, even if they had cared to seek one. For the voices of London swept in, insistent, insidious, and would not be denied.

And westward, amid his barren splendour, Potiphar, mocked by his son's idol, slumbered, oblivious and unprepossessing.

CHAPTER III

THE FORTUNES OF KITTY

THROUGH the years that brought Osric to the threshold of young manhood, Kitty had drifted gaily, coasting Bohemia in a light craft. Her experiment had been, on the whole, a success, and the ponderous respectability of Thames Ditton seemed part of another existence. She made entirely new, entirely "different" friends, to use her own phrase. If the desired haven of matrimony still eluded her, she did not number that among her sorrows; for freedom is a noble thing. Her way of life was curiously contradictory; private parsimony went hand in hand with public extravagance. For days, sometimes weeks, Kitty lived frugally; then she would flame out with a public entertainment. And luck came her way, in turn, when Rheingold or some of her richer friends made much of her. When she appeared before the world, her dress bespoke the woman of means: she was a well-known figure at the play and at concerts. In her own intimate circle of the penurious, ambitious and gifted, she shone as a little female Mæcenæ. Many a starveling poet and painter was the better for her kindness on rainy days. But withal she maintained an air of mystery. Those, a very few, who troubled to concern themselves about her, wondered how she kept it up.

Of these the chief was Amelia Golightly, who had

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most knowledge to go upon. Once she spoke to Potiphar. That man of business went straight to the point.

"It's quite simple," he said; "she's living on her capital, and hoping to hook a man when the end comes."

Amelia sighed. "I'm sure I hope so; that is, I don't hope so, and yet, it would seem of course that she's all right. But she still goes about a lot, I hear, with Rheingold."

"Confound Rheingold!" said Potiphar heartily, for it had long been an open secret that the elegant Solomon, together with Stingo, stood behind Punchie Hay. There was no more need of secrecy, for the *Torch* and Allied Journals was now a commercial asset of such importance that it reflected glory on its projectors. The partners had been secret only in case of failure. "Yes, confound Rheingold, and Stingo, and Hay, and all that bilin'. They're a thorn in my side, day and night, Amelia."

The alliance with the enemy cooled Amelia's ardour for Kitty, and besides, she never could altogether shake off suspicion. Would Kitty be such a fool as to beggar herself on an off-chance? Many a girl as attractive was left in the lurch. And Solomon had a reputation — for generosity. Yet, generosity conceded, Amelia understood that the doctrine of *quid pro quo* was inherent in his race. Was it likely, was it likely, that Rheingold would make exceptions?

It was disturbing. There was only one way. Mere suspicions were no ground of action; but the alliance with the enemy really left her no choice, all other grounds apart. Gradually, therefore, to Kitty's perfect satisfaction, Amelia ceased to interest herself in the maid-

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errant, and left her to go her own way, up or down. Mrs. Golightly had ceased to care about the direction.

But, gradually also, the interplay of circumstance was to react upon these two women, and Kitty was to become a factor to be reckoned with in Amelia's life. At more than one point Mrs. Golightly was to find herself and her interests threatened by the daughter of Hiram. Kitty, as she floated about her curious world, heard many things. Her world, which touched many worlds, was a sort of Ear of Dionysius. Into it poured hints, whisperings, intimate things concerning people who were, as the saying goes, "prominent." It was useful for those gay adventurers to hear, to know, and to remember. And below Kitty's airy superficiality lay another memory, the buying out of Hiram. Although they knew it not, she and Punchie had a common cause.

The *bonne camarade* of Mr. Solomon Rheingold had met Mr. J. A. Hay on a chance occasion, and the two cynical wits had struck out of each other much agreeable coruscating fire. Rheingold, who liked his lunches to go well, often repeated the experiment, without fear, for he knew that women had no longer any dangerous interest for his able editor. Kitty and Punchie were always pleased to meet. But Miss Adderley found him, in one particular, disappointing. She often had an axe to grind for one or other of her creative friends, and Mr. Hay was a likely grindstone. But Kitty's little two's-company lunches could not move that determined egoist, and after a few futile trials, she nicknamed Punchie the "Sea-green Incorruptible," and gave him up as hopeless. Not one of her impecunious seekers after literary and artistic work would he adopt. He feared the Greeks,

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when they brought gifts, and in the matter of choosing workers, he was influenced only by hard expediency. To the personal appeal he remained deaf, and his own comfort profited thereby. Those who called him names did not matter.

Of course there was a higher power — Solomon, or even Sir Bradford. But the first time Kitty showed her hand Rheingold merely said, "Speak to Hay, but we never interfere with his judgment." Solomon had had one lesson from his little strong man, upon whom he had tried to force a protégée.

"My dear Mr. Rheingold, her work is *negligible*," Punchie had said, striking the table. "We have no place for such."

And Solomon, knowing when he was well served, without fear or favour, let the matter drop, although it cost him something in private alimony. Hay was the very pulse of the machine. Only a fool would disturb its action.

But Kitty, balked in this avenue of backstairs influence, looked around. She understood the value of many bow-strings. There was another, which she had never quite lost sight of, although as the years went on, opportunities had been few. Yet she was tenacious, never forgetting, in spite of many preoccupations, the counter that might be useful one day, as the game shifted. Sometimes she saw her man at the play; once or twice, when he happened to be with a person they both knew, she had passed the time of evening, and in her heart she longed for his better acquaintance. She had never forgotten their first meeting. Perhaps Potiphar's banalities and unfitting jocosity on that occasion had made

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her think more of the affair than a normal girl should. But, there it was—and he was certainly a very presentable person. So was Solomon, but then, the other was, well, younger, more English somehow. Rheingold had yielded too much to foreign culture. These things counted insensibly. And so the game went on.

The years, drifting insidiously away, found Kitty developed and intensely vital. She was enjoying life, and, personally, in no hurry. The passage of the earlier twenties had increased her charm, the rawness of mere girlhood had passed, but she had kept her freshness superbly. Her new surroundings had purged her of suburbanity. Kitty was *mondaine*, but of a pleasing type; healthy, and, so far as town allowed, open-air. For a moment, in the early days of emancipation, she had used cosmetics. Solomon intervened with a delicately judicious warning, and Kitty fled the pot, to her everlasting satisfaction and consolation, when she looked in the glass every birthday morning.

But for all her care in alternating the lavish with the frugal, this way of life was expensive. She had budgeted carefully at the outset, allowing herself so many years freedom, and fixing a careful annual limit; but, like other budget-makers, she always exceeded her estimate. Still she comforted herself that she must always have *appeared* to be living at double her actual rate. The best restaurants accounted her a useful occasional customer, others, not quite in the first flight, but still good, really valued her; the theatre ticket agencies had a sufficiency of business, though Kitty preferred and often could obtain "paper," and she was generous to the unfortunate. Her dressmaker's name was a

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secret that not even her dearest friends could penetrate. But in that particular, and in hats, Kitty actually *saved*. It was something to have taste and a deft pair of hands.

All the same, those who live sportively on capital, however careful they be, must sooner or later face a day of reckoning. For Kitty it brought other reckonings, nice calculations of probabilities, reviews and estimates of character, minute stocktaking of friends and acquaintances. She was not disappointed, exactly. She was still pretty and desirable. She had had a ripping run for her money, and while it lasted the pace had been too good to inquire into petty details. Besides, the sense of freedom had been too exhilarating to permit of sentiment. Ahead might lie restriction, even a qualified servitude; but that, although, strangely enough, the chief end of her quest, Kitty had never stopped to consider seriously. Still less had she taken means to force or secure it. It seemed to her brilliant and sanguine Ego that the thing was inevitable. In due time someone *must*. Meanwhile she must give herself every chance and as wide a choice as the world could afford. She did not romance. It was, at bottom, a practical question, the discovery of a Universal Provider. Meanwhile she could provide for herself to a dancing tune. While that was possible, sing hey for independence and the *va et vient* of a London that lived to amuse and be amused! Kitty's world lay between Hyde Park Corner and Temple Bar; Portland Place and Chelsea Embankment: Playhouse-land, Club-land, Eating-house-land, Music-land, Gallery-land, Studio-land. The last may have broken bounds for chance excursions into Bayswater, Holland Park, Hampstead, or Bedford Park, but the real region of interest was

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that between the lines laid down, with Piccadilly Circus as its burning focus. For, after all, the outposts have their eye continually on the centre, and take the law from the centre, where the daily, nightly merry-go-round swings unweariedly, while the children of men flourish and fade like the generations of the leaves.

There may have occurred in Kitty's meditations on past and future some little root of bitterness that Solomon had remained, to all ultimately practical purposes, stationary. He had shown a lack of enterprise. But one could hardly quarrel with that; for he had been a charming and not unrewarding friend. Money? Oh, no! That would have been impossible; but Kitty loved jewels, and Mr. Rheingold had a perfectly exquisite taste in such baubles, a taste as exquisite as his tact in making the gift. And he gave out of a pure heart. It was sufficient for him to see her looking nice the next time they went out together. She could easily wear them without remark, for was it not quite well known that she had independent means? Certainly. And it was no business of Amelia Golightly's where she got them or how much she had out of the wreck. But no fear, Amelia Golightly would have reasons of her own for not trumpeting the amount of Kitty Adderley's private fortune. Its size reflected no credit on Golightly's, except as a certificate of proficiency in sharp practice.

Only Providence knew her resentment towards the House of Golightly; but in the eternal fitness of things she was to be used as an instrument inimical to that institution.

She had weighed Solomon in the balance, and although she did not find him altogether wanting, still — he was

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slow; the exchequer declined, and the policy of several bow-strings commended itself with an urgency hitherto unknown. None of the interesting clever young men of her intimate, amusing entourage were of course worth a moment's serious consideration. And there was always that memory of another possible counter. The time had come, perhaps, to get it in hand, and the opportunity arose with surprising naturalness. She took action, already contemplated; for once more she had an axe to grind, two axes, to be quite precise, her own and another's. To do Kitty justice she thought less of her own than of the other's.

That other was one of her latest and dearest friends, who had come to her, as it seemed, out of nowhere. But that is never surprising in the world Kitty had made for herself. Lynette Holiday was another of those pleasant atoms of human flotsam and jetsam that beat about upon the great ocean of London life, keeping afloat no man knows exactly how. These gentle half-forsaken creatures drift on a sort of backwash from the art schools, the stage, the musical academies, the studios, and, in some instances, the Universities. They coalesce into merry, happy-go-lucky, amiable coteries, charmingly loyal, delightfully well-bred, exquisitely sensitive, generous to one another in distress, ever interested, like a fresh race of Athenians, in some new thing. They skirt the world of the pioneers, contriving often to know them, and their modest lodgings echo sometimes to the praise of the latest idol of the market-place, but more often to that of the deserving unrecognised. A little arrogant, perhaps, and opinionative they may be; intolerant, but with the pardonable intolerance of youth and enthusiasm,

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Such was Kitty's court, in which she shone with a steady radiance, loved, admired, envied a little for her apparent security. They would have liked her even more had they known that she was only another gambler with Fortune, like themselves. But that she kept to herself.

Lynette Holiday had been brought to one of Kitty's chance-medley tea-parties by an invited guest. She was a fair slip of a girl, with a Burne-Jones mouth, poetical blue eyes, quaint dress, and a peculiar graciousness of manner, distinguished even in that circle of oddly gracious beings. Kitty's heart had warmed to her at once, and she had decided that Lynette was a person to be helped. At first Kitty had put her down as a musician, but she discovered that Lynette was accounted by a fit few quite a wonderful poet. Her name, it seemed, was to be seen, all too seldom, beneath verses in one or other of the more reputable weekly reviews. But these fine words, alas! buttered no parsnips. Fortunately, however, Lynette could write little stories, not nearly so good as her verse, and consequently a more marketable commodity, if the market could be found. She was quite alone in the world, and none of the circle knew her history, except that she was well-born and miserably poor. As their intimacy grew, Kitty made diplomatic inquiries about the little stories, read one or two that had found chance acceptance in one or other of the innocuous magazines, and decided that they were just the sort of thing one saw in certain publications where she might possibly use some influence. Mr. Hay, to be sure, was hopeless—obstinate creature—but there were others—*another*. The way being clear of unpleasant

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encounters, Kitty made haste to take it, for Lynette's sweet sake. For a month past she had been practically keeping the poor darling, who had had nothing — either poem or story — accepted for ages.

She did not write beforehand to ask for an interview. Her name, she believed, would carry her in. Memory aided her to choose a relatively convenient hour.

"Miss Adderley, sir," said a stiff youth in the uniform of Golightly's body-guard.

Dorian took Kitty's card with curiosity.

"Yes," he said, after a moment's consideration; and the youth vanished perpendicularly. During the pause that followed, he wondered what the deuce the lady could want. Had she turned literary aspirant, or was it mere advertisement? Not at all unlikely. In this new age women of Kitty's stamp had many irons in the fire. The days of the Duchess de Dino's — "Thank you, we can do very well without the Press," had long gone by.

His visitor advanced to the attack, full sail, and her yards, he noted, were very neatly trimmed. What guns did she carry? That would shortly appear.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Stepney." Kitty emptied a broadside from her eyes, and sat down, in the very chair where she had sat during her interview with Potiphar. What ages it seemed since then!

"It's shameful, I know, to take up your time ——"

"Not at all, I am delighted ——" Dorian looked at his visitor, and realised that for once the old, threadbare, lying civility was sincere. But, as he was a man of business in a business hour, although not the busiest, habit sent him straight to the point without preamble. "What can I do for you, Miss Adderley?"

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"I want to ask a very great favour," Kitty blushed faintly.

Dorian bowed. How stereotyped, after all, such interviews were!

"I wondered," Kitty went on, twirling her umbrella handle between her finger and thumb, "I wondered whether you would care to look at the work of a little friend of mine ——"

Ah! the old story. If not for herself, at least for another. The old game of getting at an editor somehow. Well, men in his profession were considered fair mark for such appeals. Aloud he said, "What kind of work?"

"She writes little stories, charming little stories, I think." Kitty drew out some papers.

"But, my dear Miss Adderley, the *Beacon* does not publish *little* stories." Those amateurs always went wide of the mark. They had no idea. They would offer "Paradise Lost" to *Punch*, and the "Bishop of Rumtfoo" to the *Quarterly*. "And I fear," he went on, "in any case we never take the work of unknown writers."

"I know, I know," Kitty flashed back; "poor papa let me into that secret long ago. I wouldn't have dreamed of the *Beacon*, but Golightly's has lots of other things. I was thinking of some of your little 'home' papers ——"

"Even there, I fear, we have hardly any opening. The work is done for the most part by regular contributors, and with the choosing of it I have practically nothing to do."

"I quite understand; but I thought, perhaps, a word from you would at least get my friend's work considered."

"We are always glad to consider ——" Dorian smiled

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as he fell into the empty stock formula that temporises, and paves the way for rejection of so much hopeless endeavour; "we are always glad to consider new work, but you know as well as I do, Miss Adderley, how very small the chances are. Still, if you'll leave your friend's work with me, I'll see that it is carefully looked at in the proper quarter."

"It's awfully good of you. Thank you so much. These are the things. Two printed and one in MS. And you'll let me know soon, please. It will be a great kindness if you can take anything, for she's terribly in need of some work."

"Alas! that's a cry we hear every day; but you know, Miss Adderley, as well as I do, that a business like this is not a charitable institution. No necessity of the author's can influence us. If the work is what we want, well and good; if not — you understand?"

"I quite understand, Mr. Stepney. I, as a daughter of the House, remotely, as it were, would be the last person in the world to mistake Golightly's for a charitable institution. Still, it will mean a lot for Miss Holiday to have her work even considered, and I'm grateful for your promise. I've put in a stamped envelope for the return of the things."

Dorian smiled and took the packet. A most practical young woman! Sensible too. That little ironic gibe at the House was very neat, and, all things considered, heartfelt. Not altogether diplomatic, perhaps, considering her position as suppliant, but he had given the opening, and, well, Potiphar deserved it. Poor old Hiram! What an improvement on him this charming being was. She must have rubbed a lot with a wider world. Dorian

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liked her daring in coming to him; for was it not just whispered that Kitty was at least acquainted with Day and Rheingold? Why didn't she go to Solomon? Well, one never knew. And it might not be amiss to have a friend in the other camp. Dorian had a glimpse down long vistas hitherto unperceived. Carefully he laid aside Lynette's papers, after making a note in red pencil on the envelope. Kitty watched and took heart. Evidently Mr. Dorian Stepney was interested. He had been strictly business-like, and perhaps a little plain-spoken, but that did not matter. Even his plain-speaking pleased her; it gave her more hope than elaborate professions of interest would have done. And with it all he had been very pleasant, deferentially courteous even in his brutality, and his voice was charming. He knew how to speak to a woman. No wonder poor Amelia — but there! this was hardly the place or the time to think of Amelia. No doubt Dorian knew his own business best. Perhaps she amused him. There was no accounting for the amusements of men who had resisted matrimony up to seven-and-thirty, or so. But in a year or two he, yes, *he*, might be less accountable still. Forty was a fearful test. It sometimes meant shipwreck. Even the best-balanced minds sometimes wavered then. Well, there was time to — Kitty returned almost with a start from her mad reverie. It would not do to outstay her welcome.

She rose and held out her hand. Again her eyes discharged a broadside.

"Good-bye, Mr. Stepney, and thank you so much. You'll let me know."

"In a day or two, without fail. It has been charming to meet you again, Miss Adderley. Good-bye."

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Dorian closed the door and looked at his watch. It was not yet six o'clock. He lifted a house telephone, and put the switch to one of the lesser departments of Golightly's.

"Is that Miss Swillet? Ask Miss Swillet to speak to me, please. Oh, Miss Swillet, I'm sending you along some stuff by a new writer. Please let me know very soon if you think it would be in the line of the *Flapper*. Give it your most favourable consideration."

He rang off. Again the stiff youth stood by his side in answer to the bell.

"Take these to Miss Swillet," Dorian said; and Lynette's innocent packet, charged, however, with fate for the House of Golightly, sped away on the second stage of its journey.

Dorian lighted a cigarette, settled a few matters of detail with subordinates, and the hour being now at hand, went leisurely to his club to rest and dine before the heavy labours of the night.

His thoughts had taken a new direction.

CHAPTER IV

VARIOUS COUNSELS

A CRISP early October afternoon found Osric and Welshpoole "at a loose end," as they said, in London. It was not a *matinée* day, and nothing particular was afoot. They strolled idly down St. James's Street, crossed the Park, and stood on the bridge looking at the ducks.

"Beastly stale," said Welshpoole.

"Beastly," Osric echoed. "Wish term were begun."

"Let's go up through the Arcade, and then on to Vigo Street, to see whether there are any new poets."

"Or," said Osric, glancing up at Queen Anne's Mansions, "let's call on old Stepney. The mater has asked him to come up with us on the 14th. Not bad to have a chap who knows the ropes when one first goes up, you know. Brilliant idea of the mater's."

"Decent sort, old Stepney. Well, let's rout him out. Better than hanging about."

They moved towards Queen Anne's Gate. As they came in sight of the forbidding archway of the mansions a servant was putting a portmanteau on the top of a waiting taxi. A moment later Dorian got in and drove off. The boys were still too far away to hail him.

"Dash!" said Osric.

"Gone to South Plimsoll, to address howling mobs," said Welshpoole. "Think he'll get in?"

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"Don't know. Pater says he's slack, and won't go down enough to nurse the place. He pleads business. Old man wants him to take things easier a bit at the office. Offers to take Do's place for a turn, and go back to the collar, you know. Energetic old boy, the governor, when he likes."

"Um," said Welshpoole, thinking his own thoughts. "Your pater coming up with you on the 14th?"

"Oh, yes. Too much fuss, I think, about the whole affair. Wish I could go up alone; but the mater wants to make sure I'm comfortably settled, and all that. However, Stepney'll show them round, and so on. Well, I suppose it's the Arcade and the minor poets in the shop windows."

"We can go round to that music shop in Bond Street afterwards. I'm going to set up a new banjo."

Cawdor Thlangothlen, Sixth Earl of Welshpoole, had an inimitable touch upon the banjo. It was his one straightforward accomplishment, and might have been his salvation, had not other forces been too strong.

"And I," said Osric, "want some cigarettes. I've found a new kind — beauties — at a new place. Dashed expensive, however; but expense adds fascination to the flavour, doesn't it, Welsh?"

"Certainly, my dear Osric, especially when one doesn't bear the expense oneself."

"But you haven't had any of these yet?"

"I didn't mean that ——"

"Oh, about touching the mater — I see. She's a god-send. The old boy's got notions. Been giving me broad hints lately upon economy and how to manage my income at college. His views, Welsh, are primitive. I'm to have

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an allowance. It's to come out of shares in Golightly's. They're put to my name. I'm to receive the dividend, and make it go as far as I can. I'm also expected to take a lively interest in the Stock Exchange, and to manipulate certain other shares, to increase my income, if possible. Excellent practice, the governor calls it. I told him it was a bore, and asked if he couldn't just pay my bills as they come in. He thought that would put a premium on extravagance. And there we had to leave it. But the mater will see me through."

"Lucky beast," said Welshpoole fervently. "I'll have to put up with an allowance, and a tightish squeeze it'll be, I fear."

"Lean on me, old friend."

"Gladly; but you'll have enough to do with yourself."

"Oh, there are ways and ways. I'm a rich man's son, and I mean to behave as such. The gov's got to pay, in the end. I'm not going to let him off. He thinks three hundred ample. Why, Guggenheim, who went up from our house last year, had eight."

"By the by, did you hear how he got scored off one night in hall?"

"No."

"Thompson told me. I met him the other day. It seems Guggenheim didn't like his company, and said in a loud voice that, as there was a separate table for scholars, so there should be another for gentlemen."

"And a third," said someone, "for Guggenheim, who is neither a scholar nor a gentleman."

"Ha, ha! Poor old Gugs; he always fancied himself."

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Laughing, they went arm in arm to hunt for minor poets, by way of the Arcade, which interested them so deeply that they made three turns up and down before they finally emerged at the top. On the way to Vigo Street Welshpoole introduced Osric to a convenient hostel just opposite the New Burlington Street entrance, and there he saw more fascinating sights still. After all they had not had such a dull time.

Meanwhile, in certain chambers beside the Thames, another colloquy was in progress. The Triumvirate still held occasional meetings at their old haunt. A sentimental vein led Solomon to cling to the place, where a great enterprise had come to birth.

"We have gone far," he was saying, "but I'd like to see a little speeding up."

"You mean," said Stingo, "that the enemy is still pretty firm on his legs."

"Precisely."

"Their profits are falling, however."

"Quite true, Hay. But not enough to cause a stampede among the shareholders."

"It will come."

"One day, yes. But the concern is fairly vital."

"You know why?"

Stingo and Rheingold nodded. Solomon blew a speculative smoke-ring.

"Yes, it's more and more a one-man show. The old boy's getting past it. Too much good living, I hear, if all accounts be true."

"True enough, I believe," said Stingo.

"Our policy must be to attack the mainspring."

"But, my dear Hay, how is that to be done? Remem-

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ber the complications. Your candidature for South Plimsoll is sufficient attack surely."

"I admit it has bothered them. He's been really active down there lately since old Brindleham had his last bad turn; but I'm not sure that the whole thing hasn't been a bit of a blunder on our part. In fact, I'm ready to withdraw ——"

"Withdraw?"

"Never!"

"I mean it; for I believe I see a better game. Stepney, as an enemy only redoubles his energy in the business. That postpones what we want to see; indefinitely. He is, as you know, deeply interested in the concern. He'll fight tooth and nail to keep it going. Hitherto our policy has been purely destructive. How about something constructive? We can't hope to buy him over to us, the day for that has long gone past, I fear, but there's still a shot in the locker ——"

Punchie paused and looked at his colleagues.

"You mean absorption?"

"I do."

"But our game was the complete smash of Golightly's," Stingo objected.

"I fear we must abandon that. But, mark you, we still score, and heavily. This, I take it, was more or less a personal attack; if the day should come, and come it will, when old Golightly can save his beloved concern only by amalgamation with us, *us*, remember — it's worse for him than any catastrophe. It will hit him where he lives."

"But about Stepney?"

"He will only be concerned to save his own pocket

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when the pinch comes; and, mind you, it's coming. Therefore, I propose that we keep Mr. Dorian Stepney well in view. Meanwhile we continue as before, with due attention to speeding up,"— Punchie bowed to Solomon—"so as to hasten the day of Golightly's necessity. In the hour that we 'take him over' I think we may consider that we have not lived in vain."

Only Solomon savoured Punchie's irony in its full bouquet. Stingo, far less subtle, still hankered after a colossal smash. He liked the effects of Drury Lane. Rheingold understood drama of another school. His eyes glistened as he followed Punchie's argument, and he felt just a little pang of jealousy that he had not thought of this himself. Hay was the devil to think. Good Lord, Golightly's "taken over" by the *Torch* and Allied Journals! What more could Stingo want? Solomon wondered whether old Golightly would survive it. But still Sir Bradford clung to a cruder ideal.

"It seems a bit like defeat for us," he grumbled. "It's a compromise with what we set out to do."

"It's an *improvement* on it," Solomon urged.

"You'll find Stepney a tough nut to crack."

"He's an out and out time-server, Sir Bradford."

"Perhaps, Hay, perhaps; but his interest in the house of Golightly doesn't end with £. s. d."

"How do you mean?"

Sir Bradford cackled unamiably. "Never mind," he said, with a heavy man's mystery. "I'm no mischief-maker. I see your point, however. If amalgamation it's to be, some day, Stepney's plainly the only man who can wangle it. As time goes on, we'll see how he's to

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be worked upon. There may be ways, ha, ha!" And again Sir Bradford laughed unamiably.

Solomon looked at his ally, pondering many things in his heart. Queer tags of memories, hints, whisperings rose up and gave him faint rays of enlightenment. But he asked no questions.

Punchie, if he understood, gave no sign. Evidently they had quelled Stingo's rumbling objections. That was sufficient.

"I am going to renew old friendship with Dorian," he said. "It's only decent that rival candidates should be friends. And further, I mean very likely to lay him under a debt of gratitude to me."

"You're not going to withdraw?" Stingo asked.

"Not at any rate until the psychological moment. I consented to stand, my dear friends, to please you. In withdrawing, if I do withdraw, I'll please myself. That's only fair, isn't it?"

"But think of the score for Golightly's."

"Inconsiderable. The question of two rival newspaper concerns does not agitate the public at all. It hardly realises what Stepney and I stand for respectively. We journalists look at the world too much with journalists' eyes, and we fancy that because our eyes are on all the world, therefore all the world's eyes are upon us. It's not so. The public hardly distinguish between one journal and another. It has no idea who owns this or that organ. The man in the street never can remember in what paper he read a particular thing. To him the *Graphic* is even as the *Illustrated*, and he has a superstition that they both issue from one house. He *may* be able to distinguish between the *Sketch* and the *British*

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Weekly, because the former is a serious paper and the latter entirely frivolous; but that's an extreme case. No, no, if I throw up South Plimsoll, with which I'm already sufficiently bored — and I've enough to do elsewhere — it will not cause even a tremor in the great placid bovine mind of the British public."

"I believe you're quite right, Hay," said Solomon.

"I am," said Punchie decisively.

Sir Bradford grunted. When Hay and Rheingold were against him, he knew it was useless to fight. They always got round him in the end. And their way invariably turned up trumps. Clever devils, the pair of 'em.

"And about your psychological moment, Hay," Solomon pursued; "when's that coming?"

"Ah," said Punchie, guardedly. "Wait and see."

At that they left it, and the symposium broke up.

CHAPTER V

THE HEAVY FATHER

OSRIC, my boy," said Mr. Potiphar Golightly, "I want a word with you after dinner."

The father beamed at his son across the table. He felt the importance, the responsibility of a man who has a duty to perform, and he had fortified himself accordingly. It was a benevolent hour, his mission was benevolent, not untouched with the finer and more humane sentiments of our imperfect nature. Here was a young man going out into the world to a freedom greater than he had ever tasted. True, he would still be under tutors and governors, but school days were over. Before the week was out, Osric would be described in other boys' casual talk as a "man." He would have a man's opportunities of going to the devil or into better company. His father, it is true, had only a dim notion of the world into which his boy was to be thrust; but he had considerable experience of life; he knew that in all throngs of men, however different individually, there was an average, to which the average man's counsel might apply. He saw his duty as a father, and prepared to do it. "Yes," he continued expansively. "I'd like a word with you."

"Oh, all right," Osric answered casually. He was annoyed; for he meant to go out immediately after dinner. Still, that question of the allowance was in his mind. A little deference to the old man might screw it up a bit.

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"Am I out of this council?" Amelia asked softly from her end of the table.

"Not at all, my dear; but perhaps you might give us a few minutes to ourselves. I'm going to talk to Osric as man to man."

Amelia rose. Osric opened the door for her.

"You'll find us in the library," Potiphar called after his wife. "Come, Osric."

"Sit down, boy," Golightly said, with unusual ceremony. "Have a cigar—a mild one." He handed a box to his son with elaborate ceremony.

Wondering whether the new tokens of emancipation would extend to whisky, Osric chose his cigar like a *connoisseur*. Potiphar mixed himself a peg, but went no further. He lighted his own cigar and sat down.

Osric waited, a little oppressed with ritual, a little inclined to laugh. He had not seen such solemnity since that far-off day when his father, exasperated beyond all bounds at some transgression, had brought him in here to give him a thrashing, but was stopped, just in time, by the mother's tears and prayers.

Potiphar took a long pull at his peg, sighed, settled himself in his chair, and blinked at his son affectionately. Then he opened his mouth and spake, with elaborate and pompous care.

"My dear Osric, as I shall be much occupied during the rest of the week, I have taken this opportunity of speaking quietly to you as a father must, when his son goes out into the world for the first time. It is true you have mixed in what is called by the late Archdeacon Farrar the World of School—did you, by the way, ever read that excellent story of his? I used to enjoy it in

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my young days. You never saw it? Well, well, times change. From that and *Eric, or Little by Little*, I got my only ideas of an educational world from which early circumstances, alas! debarred me. From the same excellent writer's *Julian Home*, I derived almost my only intimate notions of our great University system. Yes, you have mixed, Osrice, in the world of school, but that which now lies before you is very different. You will enjoy, within limits, a man's privileges; you will be exposed to a man's difficulties and temptations. In *Julian Home* you can see what these are ——"

"Ever read *Verdant Green*, pater?"

"My dear boy, that book is a joke, and was written as a joke. I am speaking of a serious picture of life."

"Old Dorian says *Verdant's* still the best fresher's guide to Oxford, and that *Julian Home* (which refers, I believe, to a place called Camford, wherever that may be) is negligible; not even a bad joke ——"

"Well, well, my boy, however that may be, I learned a great deal from the book. There are many pitfalls, Osrice, in your new life. Foolishness in youth is pardonable, and I dare say the authorities look with a lenient eye on the faults of mere thoughtlessness; but — I speak as man to man — some things cannot be pardoned, and they mean an end of one's college career. I do warn you most affectionately to avoid all excess; take all lawful enjoyments for which I will make ample provision — but ——"

"I say, pater, couldn't I have a bit more than three hundred? Other fellows with fathers not so well off as you get more.— It doesn't go very far when one has to keep one's end up, you know ——"

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"I have consulted people who know. Our friend Stepney had only his scholarship £80 and £150 over from his father, and he was all right ——"

"But he was a reading man, and only went about with poor men ——"

"Don't interrupt me, Osric. I shall not countenance extravagant ways. And remember I expect you to read diligently for your Tripos ——"

"There's no Tripos at Oxford, dad ——"

"Well, well, whatever it is. It's all the same. Remember, I'm to have no failures. You are receiving advantages such as your father never had"—Osric struggled with a yawn—"such as he would have been glad to have. It is to fit you to carry on my work as efficiently, I hope more efficiently, if possible, when I am laid aside. It will not be easy, the times are changing, and competition"—Potiphar sighed—"is mercilessly keen. Golightly's once held the field, now it has to fight every inch of the ground. I look to you, Osric, to improve your time. Many men would have flung you into the business now, without another three years' delay; but I recognise the ultimate gain to you, educationally, socially ——"

Mr. Golightly paused and applied himself to his peg.

"Yes, I recognise all that, and I look forward in hope to see Golightly's with a strong young hand at the helm, retrieving any leeway, sailing at last to victory over all enemies — before I go under the sod."

Potiphar, visibly moved, wiped away a tear.

"But, dad, you've got old Dorian, and he's cleverer than I'll ever be — at business."

"A servant is not a son, as I once said to your dear

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mother. And you do not know yet what your business abilities may be. You have had no chance to prove them. In the arrangement I have made for your income you will have an excellent chance of practice in money matters. You have to manage your own expenditure and learn to live within your means. You are not to contract debts, which, I hear, is the rule. If you are wise you will follow a plan of mine when I was a young man. Keep a little pocket-book and set down every sixpence, the moment it goes out, no matter where you may be. Balance accurately every Saturday evening. I shall expect to see a very carefully kept account at the end of term."

As Potiphar continued his harangue with rising pomposity, Osric's effort to attend sank into resigned boredom. Good gracious, the pater didn't know what he was talking about.

"You understand me, Osric?"

"Oh, yes, perfectly."

"I have talked to you frankly, as man to man. I believe that after a certain point a father must resign the superior position and speak to his son as an equal. You are leaving boyhood behind; see that in all things your future conduct is worthy of a *man*, and of the great position you are one day, I hope, to fill. Circumstances have denied you the satisfaction of being, like myself, the architect of your own fortunes, but you have the equally heavy task of sustaining them, and of handing them on unimpaired to your own sons. I look towards you, Osric, my dear boy, to *wisely* improve your opportunities."

What a pity, Osric reflected, that the pater split

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his infinitive. Just at the last, too. Otherwise it was a fine effort—and well prepared, evidently. Osric was out of temper; for he saw that any attempt on his part to screw a more generous allowance out of his father would be useless, at least to-night. The old man seemed to have made up his mind. One hope alone remained, the mater. And here she was, at last.

“May I come in?”

“Oh, certainly, my dear, certainly. I’ve just been telling Osric what we expect of him at college. A boy is none the worse for a word from his old father, when he makes a new start in life. And a lot depends on Osric.”

Amelia sighed and sank into her chair.

“Yes, dear,” she said, “we hope you’ll have a very happy time at Oxford.”

“Thank you, mater, dear. I hope so too. In fact, I mean to. But—one needs the wherewithal.”

“You don’t need to trouble about that, surely?”

“Three hundred’s short enough.”

“Your father has gone into the question very carefully. He believes it’s ample. Mr. Stepney had much less.”

“But I was telling the pater,” said Osric oracularly, “that old Dorian was a bit of a smug, for all he’s such a good sort. I’ll need to keep a horse, and perhaps a car, and entertain slightly. Our fellows who are going up with me are all pretty well provided with the stuff. You wouldn’t like me to get left.”

“Horse! car! stuff!” said Potiphar. “The idea! I must say, young man, you’ve got notions.”

“You mustn’t be extravagant, boy. Your father

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has a lot to do with his money nowadays. You know things aren't quite as they were."

Potiphar made an impatient movement of disapproval at Amelia's confession. He made haste to cover it.

"Your chief chum, anyhow, won't be very rich, for all that he's a lord. By the by, I forgot. I meant to say a word to you about Welshpoole. He's all right, I suppose, but somehow I don't fancy him. Never did. I think you'd be wiser not to be too thick with him up yonder. Keep yourself to yourself, and choose your own friends. You have the chance of a new start. And don't go playing cards for anything but small points. If I were you, I wouldn't play cards with Mr. Welshpoole at all."

"Welshpoole," said Osric severely, "is a man of honour."

"Glad to hear it. All the same, take my tip and be careful, *very* careful."

"Osric will be very careful, I'm sure, Pharie. But he can hardly cut Welshpoole. And perhaps, dear, the boy's right about his allowance. He must do as others do, and he won't be thrown altogether among the poor men, you know. To be short of money would make him an outsider, and that would mean misery."

"Ghastly misery," echoed the victim. "I'd sooner not got up." He looked at the clock. "I say, if you don't want me any more dad, I'll depart. I promised to see a man about a little dog, a beauty. Nice little chap to have with one during the day; of course he'd have to be boarded out; no dogs *kept* in college, you know, but you can see a good deal of him, for all that — jolly little beast, cheap, too."

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As Osric spoke he backed towards the door.

Potiphar made no effort to detain his son. It was long since he had had a quiet hour with the wife of his bosom. He looked at Amelia as he had not dared to do recently, and she gave him an answering smile, that awoke slumbering emotions in Potiphar's uxorious breast. Emboldened, he took her hand. She did not draw it away.

"Amelia, my love," he said, breaking the silence, "we have been less — to each other — lately, when, that is — perhaps I put it roughly — but you understand what I mean, my dear — you understand ——"

Amelia did not reply. Neither did she repel Potiphar the lover. He, poor man, soared to the seventh heaven. It was good to have an evening such as this once more. Amelia was still his.

Winged, the hours flew in peaceful, conjugal conclave. There was no resisting Amelia. Potiphar, for once, disregarded the alluring wink of his amber-hued consoler. Had he not a wife in a thousand? They talked of their boy's future; they recalled his babyhood and early boyhood. Amelia suffered herself to become tenderly sentimental. When she rose at last a promise had been given on either side. In fancy Potiphar renewed his youth. Glamour, resurgent, veiled his eyes to any perception of a bargain. Were they not, by divine ordinance, one? He made haste to follow his wife, and hummed, as he went, an old love tune.

Next morning at breakfast Osric's heart was rejoiced by the news that he was to enjoy at Oxford an income of six hundred a year.

"Mater," he exclaimed, rushing to kiss her, as soon as Potiphar had gone City-wards, "you're a trump!"

Yet it seemed to him that she took the kiss coldly.

CHAPTER VI

PREMONITIONS OF FATE

DORIAN, having "addressed howling mobs," returned from South Plimsoll the next afternoon and drove at once to the office. He looked through his letters, attended to the most urgent, and then took up the house telephone, turning the switch once more to the department that controlled the destinies of the *Flapper*. By an accident, as the sportive gods ordained, the influence or act of that minor department was now to affect the fortunes of the House itself.

"Miss Swillet? Ah, yes. Have you had time? Oh, thank you very much. No good, I suppose? What? Really? Could you come along to see me for a moment? — yes — just now. Very good."

He rang off, lighted a cigarette, and waited, while Destiny, veiled, threaded the long corridors of Golightly's labyrinthine building.

Destiny in the person of a quiet, middle-aged, plain little woman, the obscure High Priestess of Flapperdom, entered, shyly, the presence of the Mainspring. Popular with all the staff, Dorian, nevertheless, knew the value of reserve in high places. Subordinates liked him none the less that they were compelled to hold him in awe.

He bade Destiny Unawares be seated.

"You have read the stuff, then Miss Swillet?"

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"Yes, Mr. Stepney. It's not often one makes a find, but I think this is quite useful. Quite what we want," She fluttered the packet, nervously, in her hand.

"Let me see, what's the lady's name?"

"Lynette Holiday."

"Quite good in itself. People would remember it. Pretty, too, and just the thing for a girls' paper. Well, the question is, can we make room? By the way, I happened to go carefully through the last number of our little *Flapper*" — Miss Swillet trembled — "and it struck me, as probably it has you, that Mrs. Pringle is getting rather played out. That current story of hers is just a repetition: not a single new idea, or fresh situation. I admit, of course, that her mere name still counts for something; but we must have live stuff in the paper ——"

Dorian was interrupted by the telephone. He spoke for a minute or two, rang for the news editor of the *Beacon*, on afternoon duty, gave a few concise orders, and turned again, smiling, to smaller concerns, the ready man with an eye to everything. The interview with Miss Swillet saw several similar interruptions, but from each Dorian returned calmly to the point where he had left off. Miss Swillet noted and admired the master-mind, serene above bustle.

"Yes, we must have live stuff, and I fear Mrs. Pringle's day is almost over. Of course we can't be precipitate, but we might at least ask Miss Holiday to send us something on approval. There is one thing among these, is there not, unpublished? Yes. Well, if it's up to standard, accept it and ask to see others. You can always turn them down if they're rot, or unsuitable. Use your own absolute judgment. I have no personal

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interest whatever in this lady or her work. I bothered you with it merely to oblige an interested friend, who, it seems, for once in a way, may have obliged us. That doesn't often happen, does it, in these pestering axe-to-grind 'introductions'? No doubt you get your own share of them?"

Miss Swillet smiled a wintry assent, and seeing that the business was at an end, rose, like a well-constructed automaton.

"Write to Miss Holiday yourself, please, Miss Swillet. By the way, you should be able to get her cheap."

"Ordinary rates, Mr. Stepney?"

"Not *more*, certainly. If possible, a little less. And, Miss Swillet, that reminds me—your illustrations account has been, recently, just a *trifle* high. Please make a note of this. Good afternoon. I'm really very much obliged to you for troubling with Miss Holiday's stuff so soon, in spite of all your rush just now."

Murmuring "no trouble at all, Mr. Stepney," Miss Swillet glided from the presence. Discreetly she closed the door.

Dorian turned to his desk. Courtesy commanded a note to Kitty. Was it quite necessary? The fair Lynette—*was* she fair?—would hear "in due course" from Miss Swillet. That was almost sufficient, and a letter from Dorian himself was risky. It might raise extravagant hopes, never to be realised. Amateurs at the game—Lynette was little more than an amateur, though possibly a clever one—and outsiders, like Kitty, had a plaguey way of showing these chance notes about, as credentials, where only civility was intended. Mr. Dorian Stepney did not give certificates lightly, yet his

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lightest word might be construed into a certificate. Best let it go. He was a busy man — confound that telephone, again!

Still, Kitty Adderley had claims. She was the disinherited daughter of the House. But for a dodge which Dorian did not admire so much as his nominal chief, she would have had the highest claim to more than empty courtesy from every servant of Golightly's. Her father's cheesemongering profits had initiated the business. She might, perhaps she ought to, have been drawing a handsome income from the concern. Well, old Hiram had been a greedy ass, cropping the nearest thistle, and business was business. *Caveat — vendor!* That wasn't business. Dorian smiled at his whimsical parody of the trite phrase; and Kitty wasn't business. But she had been a charming, audacious interlude in a busy man's working hour. Diplomacy could word the note skilfully, save courtesy's face, and evade certificates. He stretched a finger to ring for his secretary, and paused. No, a type-written note was not indicated. He took up his pen.

"Dear Miss Adderley,

"Miss Holiday's work, which you were kind enough to show me, has been put before one of our Editors, and I hope that the report will be favourable. If so, it may be possible to find a little work for your friend; but you will understand that openings are few and far between.

"Yours very truly,

"DORIAN STEPNEY."

Methodical Dorian took Kitty's card from a little drawer where he put all such tokens, the moment any visitor, even the most casual, had gone. Their inscriptions were regularly entered by his secretary in his

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address book, but Stepney kept the cards, as a check on possible inaccuracy. He had accounted in this way for several miscarriages of letters, and had brought carelessness, abashed and apologetic, into the presence. Efficiency must be maintained, in the minutest details, when Stingo, Rheingold, and Hay thundered at the outworks of Golightly's. But Dorian's yoke, though firm, was never vexatious. It was said that there was no man or woman that worked with him but loved him. The old charm and fineness of manner, that had drawn Mr. Seneschal of Craven to his pupil, had survived the rude assaults of Dorian's calling. How far was that due to Amelia? Cynics said he knew very well that graciousness was an asset. Let fair-play put the case somewhat higher.

At leisure for a moment, Dorian, having directed and dispatched his letter, turned round to the fire. Outside an early fog veiled the October sky, but had not descended to the streets. The evening was falling raw and gloomy. Dorian stretched his feet to the blaze and turned his thoughts away from London. On Thursday he was to encounter a curious experience, when he joined the Golightly pilgrimage. It was years since he had set foot in Oxford. What would be her welcome to the renegade returned? It would be curious to meet dear old Seneschal, who had been Master of Craven now for some years, and was, they said, getting rather frail, but not yet past work by a long way. Dorian had been scandalously silent. His last letter had been a note of congratulation on the Mastership. Mr. Seneschal replied, characteristically, at some length. Beneath his urbane periods Dorian caught

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the echo of that far-off day when the latch clicked and the door stood fast between them. Well, it was a wide world, each must go his own way, and, as Golightly was never weary of saying, we must march with the times.

Dorian had marched with the times, best foot foremost. Mr. Seneschal, it was to be feared, had not. Their reunion would be interesting. Stepney was amazed to find how much he still valued the old man's good opinion, a thing of no material value. It was almost grotesque, yet there it was! a quaint survival of pedagogy, from which no man who has found a friend in his tutor can ever shake himself quite free. Strange that when he met the Master once more he might probably be in the company of the Golightlys, the representatives of forces anti-Seneschallic. Bah! Why should that trouble him? He was a man of the world, taking what life offered him without scruple or sickly conscience. Life was to Dorian a game, to Seneschal an ideal. On a day long vanished Dorian had called accounts with ideals, and had said to them: "*Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin.*" The writing on the wall, was it? Tush! But the association reacted unpleasantly.

Ah, the inevitable interruption! He looked negligently at the card the stiff youth handed to him, negligently, then narrowly. "What the deuce——? Yes, certainly, show Mr. Hay in."

Punchie entered briskly. He was keener, thinner, turning slightly grey, a little bald over the temples now. He had not worn well. But for all his diminutive size, he seemed to Dorian impressive, even distinguished.

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He took the lead, evidently determined to allow no awkwardness.

"How do you do, Stepney? Ages since we saw each other. But we lead such busy lives, both of us."

Dorian shook hands cordially.

"Yes," he agreed, "we haven't much time for social amenities. But I'm delighted to see you, Hay. Do sit down."

Punchie sat down. "My errand," he said, "is, alas! purely business. I am going round the Press, asking co-operation in a scheme — a big scheme, a charitable scheme, to be explicit. It must have the support of the *whole* Press or nothing. For many reasons I have come first to you."

Stepney bowed, carefully avoiding the ironical, the lightest suspicion of which in look or manner he knew Hay would notice. "And the scheme," he said, "what is it?"

"Christmas will soon be here, and with it the charitable appeal. You know, of course, what a host of charities there are, but how few comparatively they can reach after all. It struck me as feasible that with a huge and complete combination on the part of the Press, no poor child in London need want a Christmas dinner. It's simply a case of money and organisation. Its completeness would appeal to the popular imagination. No single paper, even the most influential, could hope to do it alone; but if all combined it might be made a colossal success, colossal."

"And the credit of initiating the scheme rests with —"

"With no paper in particular. It is announced simultaneously in all as the Press Universal Christmas Dinner for Poor Children."

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"Admirable, admirable, my dear Hay; but — forgive me — we are both old hands — you won't misunderstand me if I ask: why this abnegation on the projector's part? What is to be gained by it, if the noble scheme is to be fathered on no paper in particular? Altruism, alas! is so rare as to excite suspicion where it occurs."

"True, my dear Stepney, and the way of a wicked world excuses, almost compels, your question. But I assure you even the *Torch* has no sulphurous smoke here. It's a pure piece of quixotism, just quixotic enough, perhaps, to come to success, and all to please — pray, don't smile — all to please my little girl, who really suggested the idea to me. Needless to say, I seek no advertisement for *her*. But a chance question of little Barbara's: 'Why can't *all* poor children have a Christmas dinner?' set me thinking, and I proposed to my directors that I should sound our colleagues in the Press. Sir Bradford Stingo and Mr. Rheingold are both heartily with me, and if we can find adequate support, they will each give £500. I trust that you and your directors may see your way to join us. We shall only go forward, remember, if the entire Press — by entire I mean all the leading journals — combine with us, I should say 'combine' simply; there is no emphasis on 'us.'"

"It is magnificent certainly, Hay; and personally I'd like to see it brought to success. I have often regretted that Christmas charities necessarily left so many thousands uncared for. Of course I must consult Mr. Golightly and the Board before I can say anything definite, but you have my heartiest good wishes. Let me know, please, what the *Thunderer* and the *Wire* say."

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"I'm going on to them now." Punchie buttoned his fur coat. "The advantage of this scheme," he added, with his hand on the door-knob, "is its size. That enables me to speak freely about it, without fear. You see it can't be 'scooped' by any one journal. To attempt it alone would mean a fiasco. Yes, it's all or none ——"

Someone pushed the door Punchie was holding ajar. He gave way, and Potiphar came in squarely.

"Ah, you're engaged, Stepney; all right—see you later ——"

"Let me introduce Mr. Hay; Mr. Hay, Mr. Golightly ——"

Potiphar's eyes glinted sidelong at the visitor. He held out his hand. "Pleased to meet you, Mr. Hay." The stock formula rolled easily from his tongue. He looked again at Punchie, and Dorian fancied his chief was disturbed, pale even. Well, perhaps it cost him something to be formally civil to the enemy.

"We meet in a good hour, Mr. Golightly," Hay struck in, giving, as usual, no opening for a possible pause and consequent awkwardness. "I'm going round to our friends of the Press generally, as a sort of Christmas fairy ——"

"Ho, ho!" said Potiphar.

"Yes, I think you may be interested in the colossal scheme I've just been explaining to Mr. Stepney." Punchie, without waste of words, put the matter in a nutshell. Potiphar, before his attention had had a chance to flag, was in possession of the affair.

"I admit it has points, Mr. Hay, but we must think it over carefully. Thank you, all the same, for letting

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us know first. It is, I may say, an unlooked-for compliment. Good day, good day."

The door closed. Potiphar faced Dorian, and brought down the point of his umbrella to the peril of the Turkey carpet.

"What's he after, Dorian?"

"Nothing but the scheme, I verily believe."

Potiphar closed one eye and laid his finger along his nose. "Oh, come, Dorian, surely *you're* not getting green in your old age."

"It may look like it, I admit; but the circumstances are peculiar, exceptional. You heard him say it was his little girl's idea. I happen to know that Hay is utterly and wholly bound up in that child, who is his only interest in life out of business. He lost her mother, a charming woman, at her birth. It was a sad story, I understand."

"Ay, so? Well, it's peculiar, as you say. But if it gets taken up, we must, I suppose, fall into line. Golightly's mustn't get left. But I don't half like following *their* lead. They'll manage to suggest, somehow, that they hatched the scheme."

"Personally, I believe they'll act square, in this instance. It's all or none, as Hay says, and they can't afford to excite jealousies by self-glorification ——"

"There is that to be said, certainly. But it's a rum go. Anyhow, we may still score. If it comes off and the rest join in, 'P. Golightly £1500,' would wipe the eye of Sir B. and the Wise Man. None of the others will go as much. We'll hang fire a bit until we see, before I come down with the dust. Our friendly sycophants, the *Evening Lyre* (by the by, they're at

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me again to buy them up), would be sure to come out with 'Princely Generosity of Mr. P. Golightly!'"

Dorian looked at his principal. Yes, he was normal. The hour of dinner was not yet, and it had been a day of hurry with only a sandwich lunch between Board meetings in the City. No artificial excitement could be detected by Dorian's trained eye.

"There's something in that," he remarked guardedly. "Anyhow, we'll have plenty of time to look around and consider well."

"And after all," said Potiphar, "I hardly think he'll pull it off. The little girl, I confess, appeals to me rather, but I'm too much given to sentiment. If that boy, now, had put any such idea into my head when he was little, I'd have run the thing for all it was worth. Others, I fear, won't be so soft. Are you walking west, Dorian? Good! I'm giving up cabs, and the good lady has the car this afternoon. I'm told I must take gentle exercise, to prolong a valuable life. Ha! ha! Come along; I've several things to say to you."

A quarter of an hour later Potiphar stopped short in Trafalgar Square and thumped the pavement with his umbrella. *Mal à propos*, for he had been talking at large about Osric's approaching entry into Craven, he exclaimed:

"But why the devil did little Hay come to us first?"

"Perhaps he didn't. It may have been a mere polite fiction."

"Likely enough. He wants watching, that Mr. Hay."

"Precisely," said Dorian, "what we have been doing these many years."

CHAPTER VII

OSRIC IS ENTERED OF CRAVEN COLLEGE

THE Clerk of the Weather smiled upon Osric's entry into his new life. The untimely fog that had frowned forbidding over London during the earlier part of the week had made room for ideal October sunshine. The Thames valley showed its loveliest autumn russet as the train bearing the too-well attended freshman drew near the city of the dreaming spires.

It pulled in to a platform alive with the bustle of a new term. From a first-class "engaged" compartment the Golightly family descended with their pilot, who gave his hand to Amelia as she stepped down. The pressure of her fingers, a little longer, a little firmer perhaps than was quite necessary, had this much of excuse, that she was really grateful to Dorian for his presence. He had hinted that Osric had better, perhaps, be allowed to go up alone; but Amelia had set her heart on this excitement, and Potiphar had heard tales of sharks who beset the fresher. He wished also to call on the authorities. He had read of such visits in the lives of distinguished men. In view of this Mrs. Golightly rejoiced that they had an experienced guide.

One point Dorian scored. "You'd better drive down to college alone, Osric, and report yourself," he said. "I'll take your father and mother along to the 'Bardolph.'"

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The parent birds, trustfully resigned to their conductor, had no objection.

"Come along as soon as you can to the hotel, dear, for lunch."

"All right, mater."

Osric drove off, with his luggage. He had some idea of his route, for he had gone about a little when he was up for matriculation. But it was still sufficiently new and exciting, with all sorts of delightfully vague prospects and possibilities floating through his head. Yes, there, hull-down, as it seemed from Carfax, was the House and Tom Tower, and so round into the High. Nothing much more of interest until one had a glimpse up the Turl, and then B. N. C. and St. Mary's and the corner of All Souls. Craven stood a little apart down another street. Ah, here it was at last, with a line of cabs at the gate setting down men.

The senior porter, whose memory for faces even of matriculation candidates had not once played him false in thirty years, sprang at the cap, peered in, and said, "*Mr. Golightly.*"

Osric nodded and got down.

While he paid the cabman, the junior porter, "the young one, the drunken," as Clough says, swung the portmanteaux into the lodge.

Osric followed. A few experienced and superior persons, with seniority written large upon them, who were taking their ease in the lodge, looked him through and through. Osric tried not to blush, and failed.

They passed the resounding archway. "*Mr. Golightly!*" said the senior porter, in a loud voice, as if introducing Osric to the college walls.

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"lightly," echoed the archway ironically.

"*Mr. Golightly!*" echoed also the junior porter, as he shouldered the luggage and led the way across the quadrangle.

"You're on the Old Buttery Staircase, No. 5, sir," said the junior porter. "This way, sir."

"This way" was steep and crooked. On the second landing the porter paused, set down the portmanteaux and opened a door. Above it OSRIG read in neat white letters on a strip of black tin—"Golightly." Thrilled, he entered into his kingdom.

It struck him as somewhat chill and barren. All signs of personality had vanished with the late occupant. He recalled the charming rooms he had occupied when he was up for matric. It seemed hardly possible that these could be made equally pleasant. He crossed over to the window, and was cheered by a delightful view of Magdalen Tower. About the windows ran a bower of blood-red virginia creeper, the pride of the college. There was an iron ledge for flower-pots outside. So far, so good. In summer that would be all right. He turned round. The furniture was just passable. He peeped into his bedroom, a mere slip of a place, plain to austerity. A queer feeling of loneliness came over him.

He returned to his sitting-room. On the table was a pile of letters. Already? "O. R. G. Golightly, Esq., Craven Coll." The handwriting on each was unfamiliar and commercial. He tore open an envelope. A tailor requested his patronage. A second epistle pleaded the excellence of a wine company. A third (marked "confidential") spoke of money lent on easy terms. A fourth sang the praises of tobacco and cigars. He

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read no further. The place was growing insupportable. He looked out across the landing and read the name on the opposite door. Wallingford. What sort of a chap would he be? The door was open. There was no sound. He peeped in shyly. Evidently a senior man. The place looked homelike, and held many personal gods. A fire was burning cheerfully. Wallingford was up then. It looked cosy and friendly. A step on the stairs made him retreat. It came no farther. A door banged on the landing below, and silence fell.

Well, he had better see someone. There was no bell. He went out upon the landing again and cried "Scout" rather timidly. Again he tried in a bolder tone, in vain. Lunch was long past. Osric did not know that no domestic service would be available until his man came to clear away tea.

After the third call he gave it up, and went slowly downstairs. In the quadrangle he met one or two men, who took no notice of him. They were without caps. One wore a rag of a commoner's gown and carried a notebook. He went slowly up to the door of what seemed to be a private house in the corner, and went in without knocking or ringing.

In the archway between the two quadrangles Osric met the junior porter bending beneath more portmantaux. "Look here," he asked, "where's my scout to be found?"

"'E won't be in college till five o'clock, sir," said Atlas severely, without pausing in his walk.

Osric passed on to the lodge. The group of loungers was bigger now. He ran the gauntlet of more curious eyes. He had intended to take counsel with the senior

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porter, but could not do so publicly. As he stepped out into the street he heard someone inquire, "Who's the fresher, Weale?" and Weale, in a fine old port voice, that accorded well with his build, made answer, "Mr. Golightly, sir."

Well, it was all very casual. Nobody seemed to mind much what one did. Craven had not put itself about to welcome Mr. Osric Reginald Grosvenor Golightly, except to paint his name on a tin plate and provide him with a cold room and a sheaf of circulars. One thing was certain. There was a good deal to be done to make his quarters habitable, and evidently a lot to learn about the ways of the place. One didn't even know how to get hot water. And he wanted a wash. However, he would get that at the hotel. It was jolly old Dorian was here to give him tips. Osric knew his way to the Bardolph, up the High, through the Turl, along Broad Street, and round by Balliol. As he went he admired the festoons of ruddy ampelopsis on the walls of Trinity. There is something magical in a crisp October afternoon in Oxford when the tide of young life is once more beginning to flow through her streets after the silence and slumber of the Long Vacation, and Osric, sensitive to these impressions, awoke to the spell of the place. Brave times lay before him, in this city of dreams, new faces, new friendships, everything was new. He seemed in a moment to have shifted his centre; he saw life from a new angle, life illuminated with pleasant, stimulating fantasies. And the prospect was gilded with a vision of six hundred glittering sovereigns. The pater might whistle for that account.

Osric found the party at a late lunch. "We didn't

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wait," Amelia said; "your father was hungry."

"Hullo, Osric," said Potiphar. "Well, what did they say to you?"

"Nothing," said Osric, sitting down and unfolding his napkin.

"Have you got nice rooms, dear?" Amelia asked.

"They will be nice, I hope, before I've finished with them. Just now they don't look very swagger. It seems a casual sort of place. Nobody was about. I couldn't find my scout."

"Lunch is well over, you see, Osric," Dorian remarked, laughing. "Your man has gone home laden with broken meats. He'll be in again just before hall. You must catch him then, and receive fatherly advice. He'll proceed first of all to sell you your predecessor's bath-tub, coal-scuttle, and sundry other trifles, which your predecessor has bequeathed to him as a free gift. How often he has sold and received back these effects passes the wit of man to know."

"That looks as if there were a screw loose somewhere," Potiphar commented suspiciously.

"Custom of the country, Mr. Golightly. In Rome you must do as Rome does. Of course Osric needn't buy the things, unless he likes, but it will promote good feeling if he does. A great deal of a man's comfort depends on his scout. Look well after him, Osric, and be firm. If he's a decent man, and there are decent men even in that corrupt herd, you'll be saved a lot of worry about small details. Don't bully him, unless he's an absolute beast. They always take it out of a man who can't handle them."

Amelia beamed. How excellent for dear Osric to

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have such a mentor! It would save him from so many pitfalls. Potiphar listened with a secret grudge, and envied fathers who could give their sons this elementary advice off their own bat, as it were. Marsh-by-the-Pound had no leading to offer here. He felt that a gulf was opening between him and Osric. Evidently it was a place of curious Freemasonry, this Oxford. Dorian was talking to the boy as to a brother. Already he knew himself something of an outsider. His boy would in a week or two fall into the ways of this world, to receive an indefinable stamp. Potiphar respected the stamp, though its loss cost him a curious pang. And anyhow he was paying for it. Without his money, won in a hard fight with tough foes, young Osric would be no better than other people. He had better not start giving himself airs, however, or he, Potiphar, would give him a piece of his mind. This was all done for the sake of the business, to make Golightly's greater, more efficient, abler to cope with the enemy than ever.

"See that you don't pay too much for the fellow's trash, Osric. But, as Dorian says, humour him."

"And if you don't like the things, dear, you can easily get others."

Potiphar frowned. "Double score for the scout," he grunted. "However, I've heard that one has to put up with a certain amount of rapacity, one way or another. Here's luck to you, boy, at Oxford." Potiphar raised his glass. "And now, I suppose, I'd better call on the Master. Will you come, Dorian?"

"Perhaps I'd better wait. I think I'd rather pay my visit later. I'll walk down with you, however,

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and we can look at Osric's rooms until you join us."

Docile in the hands of his guide, but regretting that he was expected to face the parental ordeal alone, for he had some awe of the Head, who represented to him an unknown type, Potiphar agreed. He had intended to take Amelia. Evidently Stepney barred that too, for some occult reason. But he was wrong. As a matter of fact Dorian took it for granted that Mrs. Golightly would also call on Mr. Seneschal, and that was chiefly why he had excused himself. But there were other reasons for wishing to meet his old tutor alone.

"You will find the Master a very charming man," he said to Amelia.

"I am sure I shall."

Potiphar looked up. Then there was no objection to his taking Amelia. He was pleased; for he liked to show his wife off. At such times Amelia was a great support.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PILGRIM

“LET us go round by the House,” Dorian said, as they reached the end of the Corn Market.

“The how much?” Potiphar asked.

“Christ Church,” Dorian explained.

“Oh, Christ Church College. I see. Very interesting.”

“Not Christ Church *College*, pater,” Osric corrected mercilessly. Dorian had already warned him about that and one or two other solecisms.

“Isn’t it a college, then?”

“Yes,” Stepney continued, hastening to the rescue; “it is and it isn’t. Not to put too fine a point on it, it’s called simply Christ Church.

“Except by townees,” Osric supplemented.

“You seem to know a lot about it already, young man.”

“Oh, Dorian told me.”

“Umph,” said Potiphar, resigning himself to Stepney’s guide-book talk. It rather bored him; but Amelia was all agog to learn. She was in ecstasies when Dorian showed them Christ Church Hall and Staircase.

“A fine big place,” said Potiphar, to whom flamboyant Gothic made little appeal. But the spaciousness of Tom Quad touched a chord in the man of large schemes.

Peckwater Amelia thought ugly. She asked which were Mr. Ruskin’s rooms. Dorian said there was some

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doubt about them. He could not be sure. The tradition was lost. Amelia grew pensive. Would people ever ask in vain for Osric's rooms, she wondered, if he became a great man. Merton and Merton Street she thought delicious, Corpus quaint, Oriel charming, very charming — she would have liked if that had been Osric's college.

"And what college is this?" said Potiphar at length, anxious to be interested, in spite of himself.

"These are the Schools," Dorian replied.

"What schools?"

"Where they hold the examinations."

"Oh."

Potiphar gave it up. Pitfalls everywhere! Nothing seemed to be safe. That boy had just reproved his mamma for saying "New" instead of "New College," and he himself had casually remarked that before it grew dark he would like a peep at Magdalen, in his innocence pronouncing the name as if it were that of an asylum for unfortunates. New College, but not Christ Church College; and Magdalen, Maudlin; University examinations held in schools! What a place! Potiphar began to wonder if, after all, it could be a good training-ground for a business man. Evidently Oxford didn't know how to call a spade a spade.

They had reached Craven. Amelia was reconciled to its mediæval beauty, and almost ceased to regret that Oriel was not her boy's college. She had not yet seen Magdalen.

Weale welcomed Mr. Stepney effusively, and talked for a little of contemporaries. He could give every Craven man's "standing" as well as the University Cal-

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endar itself. The party separated in the quadrangle, the elder Golightlys to the Master's lodgings, Osric and Dorian to No. 5 Buttery Staircase. Osric's heavier luggage and his books had come. In the gathering twilight his rooms looked more confused and less hospitable than ever.

"Unlock your heavy boxes," Dorian suggested. "Your bedder will be up soon. She'll put things in order a bit for the night. If that rascal of yours would turn up, you might get a fire on and give the mater some tea."

"But I've nothing! Not even a teapot."

"That's easy. I'll go and politely purloin some other man's; also his tea-things, his milk and sugar. But here's your rascal, I believe."

A brisk step came up the stair. At the doorway appeared a thick-set, elderly little man, with a broad face and a light, scrubby beard. "I'm Wilkins, sir. I do for the gentlemen on this staircase. Just come up, sir? 'Ope you 'ad a good journey, sir?"

"Yes, thank you," said Osric. "Could I have ——"

"Look here, Wilkins, we want a fire and some tea, and look sharp ——"

"W'y, bless me, sir, what, w'y yes, it's Mr. Stepney, isn't it? 'Ow do you do, sir? I ham glad to see you, and I 'ope you're well. You give me quite a turn, sir, me not noticing like in the darkenin', and expectin' only Mr. Golightly. Your voice come so familiar like. Like old times, sir. Yes, I'm pretty middlin', thank you, sir, but not so hactive as I once was. One moment, sir. All right, sir. Mr. Wallingford, sir, 'e's not in. I'll just borrow 'is things, sir."

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"Right O! Wilkins. Jump about and show your agility: tea for four. I say, Osric, do you know your way to Boffin's? You do. It's always the first thing one learns here. Cut round and get a cake and a tin of biscuits."

Osric disappeared. Wilkins switched on the electric light, made a fire as if by magic, put on the kettle (Wallingford's), and bustled about with the rest of that gentleman's tea equipage.

"Mr. Golightly a friend of yours, sir?" Wilkins suggested with respectful curiosity; "nephew, perhaps."

"The son of intimate friends, Wilkins. See that you do him well."

"Cert'nly, sir. Thank you very much, sir." And after long years Wilkins once more saw the colour of Dorian's money, only this time it was at the beginning instead of at the end of term. How hard it had been to give it then! Times had changed indeed. There had been some wisdom, it seemed, in turning a deaf ear to Mr. Seneschal.

That excellent man meanwhile was playing in an impromptu comedy. When his staid butler had at last gained the Master's ear, the names of the visitors suggested nothing to him.

He greeted them with exquisite courtesy, wondering where he had met them before. His mind was still entangled in his Thucydides. Gradually, as he made conversation, the name Golightly began to carry associations. Surely he had heard it recently. Ah, yes. He glanced down at his desk on which lay a list of freshmen. He had his cue, at last.

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"You have come up with your son, to see him settled, I suppose."

"We have," said Potiphar; "just a flying visit." Inwardly he wondered whether the old gentleman was quite awake.

"I hope," the Master said, turning to Mrs. Golightly, "you will have time to see something of Oxford."

"We stay over Sunday."

"I must get you tickets for Magdalen Chapel. Had I known you were up, you should have had them for to-night. But Friday evening service, without organ, is always the *very* finest ——"

"Delightful; thank you so much, Mr. Seneschal." The Master liked Amelia's smile.

"About this boy of mine," Potiphar interposed, coming bluntly to the point. "I want him to take full advantage of what's to be got here, so as to fit him for business ——"

"Ah, my dear sir, that is a very difficult matter. We do, it is true, hope to equip young men for the battle of life, but what we can give is a temper and a training, you understand, an attitude towards life rather than a thrusting into their hand of counters for the game. You remember what my dear old friend Professor Ruskin said to his young men here—'I have nothing to give you that you can sell. If you come to the University to get your living out of her, you are ruining both Oxford and yourselves.'"

Amelia listened, charmed. Oh, if only dear Osric were not foredoomed to business!

Potiphar bowed, somewhat bewildered. "Precisely, sir, precisely," he murmured, Plainly this amiable

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old gentleman was past his work, a back number, one who had not marched with the times. At Golightly's he'd have been retired on a little pension long ago.

"I shall watch with especial interest your son's career. He did, I may say, very fairly, very fairly indeed, in his matriculation. Let me see"—the Master went to a side table and turned over some leaves of a register—"Yes, somewhat weak in Latin, Greek in some respects curiously promising. English essay good on the whole, some sense of style——"

"That's satisfactory," said Potiphar. "He'll have to do with writing; not that he'll have to write himself, but a lot to do with knowing what's what in writing in our business. Golightly's, you know, sir."

Mr. Seneschal bowed, unenlightened. Potiphar read his misty look, and hastened to explain.

"*Golightly's Scrap Book*, of which I'm the humble founder, and the *Beacon*, etcetera, etcetera."

"Ah, the *Beacon*," said the Master; "a very successful paper, I understand. Your editor is an old pupil of mine, by the way. I confess I did not foresee such a career for him——"

"We all get surprises in this world," Potiphar commented jocosely. "Dull boy, was he, eh? Well, he's come on, and no mistake. I have the utmost confidence in Stepney. My right-hand man, sir. There is no concern of mine, even the most intimate, in which he has not a guiding hand."

"Mr. Stepney has come up with us to give Osric the benefit of an old Oxford man's experience just at the beginning," Amelia hastened to interpose. She

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had rather begun to quake, for the two men were talking in alien tongues.

"A very useful thing, Mrs. Golightly. But no Mentor can do everything for the young Telemachus. He must learn much for himself in what is at first a rather trying school, I fear. But I always envy freshmen their new vision, their eyes of golden youth. I shall send for your son to-morrow and talk with him. By that time he will have seen his tutor and his work will be more or less arranged. Ah, there is the bell for evening chapel. I fear I must ask you to excuse me. Good night, good night!"

Amelia's heart warmed to the gentle old man as she took leave of him. He would be a good friend to Osric, she fancied. Potiphar departed unimpressed, except with a conviction that dons were harmless imbeciles. His conviction was touched with amused contempt a moment or two later when he saw the Master's frail, white-surpliced figure crossing almost furtively to the chapel. Deep dusk now lay over the quadrangle, from the lodge shot a broad path of light, another streamed out from the chapel door, the bell clanked monotonously, rolling peals of organ music shook the air, the chapel windows set the dark with mysterious jewel-work of ruby, sapphire, and emerald. Every moment white-robed figures flitted from dim staircases, flashed into the tracks of light, gleamed brighter at the chapel door, and faded within.

Amelia watched the scene with a full heart, Potiphar idly. A queer life this! He had not known that so much of the Middle Ages remained alive. Gradually the stream of hurrying figures dwindled, the gates of

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the organ screen went to with a dull clash. The bell struck two sharp notes, and silence fell. Presently the sound of singing floated out and out upon the quiet evening. A new term had begun.

The Golightlys sought the porter, and asked their way to Osric's rooms. Weale himself gave them pompous escort. Amelia was delighted with her first Oxford tea-party in her boy's own rooms. They were, of course, not all that they would be later; but no matter. She enjoyed herself, praised the Master, and talked of the picturesque scene in the dusky quadrangle.

"I say, Dorian, should I have kept a chapel?" asked Osric uneasily.

"To-night doesn't matter. You'd better keep one to-morrow morning. We still count terms by chapel here. Rollers haven't come in, we cling to our great ecclesiastical tradition."

A knock announced the college messenger.

"Mr. Thurlow, your tutor, sir, wishes to see you at once in his rooms."

"All right. Where are they?"

"No. 8, Staircase No. 2, second quadrangle, sir."

Osric rose. "What a bore," he exclaimed, turning to go.

"We'll go too," said Amelia. "Come to the hotel to dine, boy."

"Look here, Osric," Dorian exclaimed, "you haven't got a gown, have you? You mustn't call on your tutor without your gown. Ask the porter to lend you one. Don't take a cap."

In the lodge Osric had his second lesson in community of goods. Weale looked round, spied a rag of a com-

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moner's gown stuffed into one of the pigeon-holes for letters, drew it out, and enrobed the neophyte therewith, at the same time heartily recommending a dealer in such vestments.

Chapel was over. At the gate Dorian left the Go-lightlys, and went to report himself to the Master. He might catch him for a few minutes before hall.

Curiously moved, he pushed open the door of the Master's lodgings, and went up the wide stair to the study. He knocked, as he had knocked long ago at another door across the quadrangle. The scene was different, but the voice, the greeting were the same. How curiously naked one felt in the Presence without a gown.

Half an hour later Stepney, returning to the Bardolph, realised that there was a spiritual nakedness no vestments could hide from the eye of understanding. It was not that Mr. Seneschal had been anything but kind, even affectionate, but in that moment Dorian knew at what cost he had purchased material well-being. On the Master's wall still hung the old German woodcut of the devil playing at chess for a man's soul. Its mockery seemed more subtle, more poignant than it had been on that day of decision long ago. The gulf between Stepney and his old tutor yawned wider than ever. The Master might be limited with the inevitable limitations of the don, but he had at least lived for an ideal. The finger of the world had laid no soiling touch upon that serene spirit, from first youth tested up to extreme old age, and now towards the end, beautiful and gracious with the light of a clear winter sunset. Before that negation of things material Dorian stood

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a twice-convicted renegade, uneasy as the wilfully grosser man must be before the spiritual. He had denied his destiny; Seneschal had fulfilled his. The one must always remain a silent reproach to the other. The Master had seen in the Dorian of long ago a strange kinship with his own youth. He had known the right path for his pupil. But the boy took Fate wantonly into his own hands, and he had his reward. There could be no turning back.

Another reflection had risen to disturb Dorian as he talked with Seneschal, and he knew himself for something of a knave; no gross sinner, it was true, but a delicate trifler with forbidden things. Again he quailed, the lewd man before the pure priest, whose mild eyes seemed to read the soul. Well, he did no harm to anybody, and he gave and received impulses that uplifted two lives, otherwise monotonous, and both lonely, one at least suffering the pains of a growing isolation; for it was progressive and fettered to a nature insidiously retrograde. What would be the end? In Seneschal's illuminating presence Dorian saw it for the first time, clear and inevitable. Yet he swore to evade it. Even as he swore, Nemesis arose, and he understood that pastime had become passion.

Of that he was to know more before many hours were over. Never before had he feared Amelia's graciousness. At dinner Potiphar struck a note of genial revelry, drank luck to his son's college career, made clumsy fun of the Master, and as the bottle declined, waxed critical, with wide and wider sweeps, of Oxford and its confusing unpractical ways. Amelia grew nervous, and applied the restraining hand in vain. Potiphar's

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hilarity increased, the situation threatened discomfort. Just before eleven, Dorian suggested that he would walk back to college with Osric. Weale would let him in with the boy, for he was still, in effect, a member of the college.

When he returned to the hotel, he found Amelia alone. Her husband, she said, had had a rather annoying attack of palpitation, and had retired. They talked for a little in a casual, fragmentary way, and then Amelia said good night. Her hand, as he held it for a moment, seemed to tremble.

Dorian, disinclined for sleep, went out again, and walked as far as Magdalen Bridge, where he stood watching the moonlight on tower, college, and stream. The laggard music of the chimes awoke strange memories and vain regrets. This was the city of his soul, but he had fled from her to Babylon, to exchange the dews of Paradise for the flesh-pots. Well, there was no turning back, and yonder, beneath the roof that awaited him, the gracious woman he adored with a passion no longer fictitious, lay fettered to a nature of the earth, earthy.

The four quarters beat from the tower. Then a silvery stroke told the hour of one. Dorian turned away.

On this the first night that he had passed under the same roof with Amelia, imagination clutched and held him in a devil's vice of tormenting thought. The hours went by in a sleepless hell.

It was not to be borne. This place, with its associations new and old, had grown insupportable. Eight o'clock found him hurrying down St. Aldate's to the post-office. He sent himself a telegram.

The family party was disappointed by Dorian's recall

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to town. Osric, who came along just after breakfast, went with his mentor to the station. He had promised himself an amusing day, buying things. It was too bad to be cheated of old Dorian.

They made conversation rather unevenly.

"Has Wilkins sold you the fire-irons and the coal-box?"

"Oh, yes, only ten bob."

"That won't break you. Is Welshpoole up yet?"

"Yes, he came last night, late."

"Well, keep your end up, Osric; take all the fun you can, in reason, but don't, as Mr. Bouncer said, go the complete unicorn. It's not worth it."

The whistle drowned the freshman's answer. The train moved. Osric was left meditating upon the possibilities of the complete unicorn.

CHAPTER IX

OPTIMISTS AND PESSIMISTS

ON the platform at Paddington Dorian met Punchie Hay. The little man came up smiling and held out his hand.

"You have heard the news?" he asked.

"What news? There is nothing particular in the morning papers."

"Oh, it was too late for the morning's. Old Brindleham's gone at last. I had a telephone message just as I was leaving home."

"Then we are face to face, I suppose."

"I scarcely think so. Frankly, Stepney, I have seen enough of electioneering to disgust me with politics. You'll not be bothered with a triangular fight, after all."

"You are going to withdraw?"

"Yes. You'll have practically a walk over. I may congratulate you at once."

"Thank you, but I'm not quite so sanguine. South Plimsoll has been tricky before. However, we'll see. This is inconsiderate of old Brindleham. I didn't want to be bothered with the fight just at present. However, it's up to me now. Good morning."

He was turning away to the telegraph office, when Hay stopped him. "One moment," he said. "The Press Universal Dinner to Poor Children is catching on. All the big people are coming in. I'll write to you later."

"Do," said Dorian, and they parted. He was annoyed

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and puzzled. What had Hay got up his sleeve? This affability could not be for nothing. Did Punchie think he had personally obliged him by retiring? And why should he oblige him? Could it be that the Stingo-Rheingold combination had, after all, bitten off more than it could chew? One could never tell. Were they shaky and seeking support from the Invincible Golightly? The Invincible Golightly! Good heavens! Where did Golightly stand in these days? Firmly enough, perhaps, but still not anxious to enlarge his borders. For some time the House had made no new move. And there were clouds on the horizon, clouds big enough to cause anxiety. Very likely the *Torch* and *Allied Journals* was feeling the pressure too. Well, they must just go to the wall, as far as Golightly's was concerned. But it was scarcely thinkable that they would look to that quarter for aid. Still, one saw such amalgamations in all businesses every day. Oppositions were often glad to come to terms with the forces they had attacked. Amalgamation? Who said amalgamation? Nobody. But the chance word set Dorian thinking. The idea would not be shaken off. Well, time would show. A funny world!

This vacancy in South Plimsoll meant an unwelcome disturbance of routine. Dorian sent some telegrams, and drove to the office to make arrangements. He must go down to his constituency at once. Messages from his agent were awaiting him. When he had dealt with these he took up his ordinary letters. One was amusing, perhaps a little disconcerting.

Whew! a very coming-on young woman!

"Very nice of you, my dear Miss Adderley," he thought

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to himself, "but it will be some little time before I can lunch with you. Then, perhaps, you will have an M.P. for your guest, and that, if I read your character aright, won't altogether displease you. Now what more does the little baggage want out of me? But perhaps it's only gratitude for giving her Miss What's-her-name something to do. She certainly gushes about it, as if I'd done something kind, quite apart from business convenience. But let's hope it's gratitude, that exquisitely rare and precious thing in a sinful and time-serving world."

He smiled and scribbled his apologies, pleading the election as an excuse. Should he say he hoped to lunch with Kitty later? What earthly interest had he in her, or in any woman, save one? He was a sort of standing joke to other men for his monkish aloofness. Wags called him the Fleet-Street Kitchener. Perhaps it would have been better for him had he been less austere. He might not then have fallen a victim to the hopelessly impossible, and might have spared himself such misery as the past night had brought him. It was hindering his efficiency. And yet he saw no escape. But plainly, he had been too much centred on one worship, content with a homage barren of all save Dead Sea fruit, for so the emotions of yesterday had revealed it. He should have looked farther afield, as other men did. Chivalry had died with Don Quixote. No escape? Did he want any escape? Scarcely. And yet, and yet —

Inconsequently as he thought, he took up his pen again and finished his note. One day, when this tiresome election was over, he would be delighted to lunch with Miss Adderley.

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A telegram came in. It was from Oxford.

"Go in and win best wishes from us all Golightly."

Later, at his rooms, he found another.

"Best of good luck hope to come down to work for you but why didn't you tell me at once what had called you away A."

Dear woman! But yet, so like a woman. And the exacting, almost proprietary, note in the last sentence was strangely disturbing. It was almost a reproach for a breach of confidence whereof he was guiltless! With Amelia, too, he now saw clearly, the affair had gone far beyond pastime with good company. What of the end — the end?

Torn this way and that, Dorian called his man, and set about preparing for his journey to South Plimsoll. He almost hoped that Amelia would not be able to carry out her plan. But, of course, she would never come without Potiphar. That way lay a certain qualified safety.

But, after all, Amelia was denied the pleasurable excitement of the South Plimsoll election. Fate laid its hand on Potiphar, who had hardly returned from Oxford when he was seized with a really alarming heart attack. The news of his danger shook the candidate with strange hopes and fears. Could it be that the cleared road of that old disturbing vision at the Carlovigian long ago was now in sight. Not a thing to let one's thoughts dwell upon; yet frail human nature would not be denied. In it Nemesis raised up a barrier. The

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candidate, with his thoughts far away, did not do himself justice; his opponent was a strong man, the constituency had changed during Brindleham's long tenure. The late member, it appeared, had only kept his seat through old respect for his personality. Dorian, sick and distracted throughout, fought a losing battle, and at length took his place on the left hand of the returning officer.

Perhaps it was as well. Golightly's required him more than ever now. The chief was to live, it seemed, but he would never be the man he had been. Dorian's defeat, however, was a bitter pill to Golightly, in spite of the fact that it left his lieutenant free. More than ever Potiphar set his hopes on his son, and longed for the day when he should see him established in the business. But the boy must finish his course first. Potiphar, convalescent, waited and hoped.

But as the months went by, the news from Oxford brought little reassurance.

"The boy is enjoying himself," Amelia said combatively. "He will soon settle down."

"High time," Potiphar growled. "I wish, Amelia, I'd clapped him into the business when he left school."

"Oh, but think of the friends he is making."

"Damn those friends. Look at these bills! He's not managing his cash at all well. Double damn that Welsh-poole and the rest of 'em."

Amelia put her fingers in her ears and left the room, to cry in secret. She was very lonely; for the invalid was exacting, and there had been little freedom lately. People praised her to her face for a devoted wife. Ame-

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lia answered with a wintry, deprecating smile. Gradually the clouds were gathering about the great House. And from afar, Rheingold, Stingo, and Hay watched and waited. Circumstances were playing into their hands.

The Triumvirate had smiled when they saw Potiphar's too ostentatious subscription to the Universal Press Dinner to Poor Children. By the time that vast scheme came to overwhelming success and was the nine-days' talk of London, Golightly was so far recovered as to take an interest in it. He was pleased to appear to play the leading part. The sycophantic *Lyre*, on which he had counted, actually alluded to it as Mr. Golightly's scheme. The Triumvirate made no obviously corrective move, except to emphasise in large type the interesting fact that the whole Press was on an equal footing about this beneficent project; none, not even the most generous supporters, sought to claim any special credit for its inception. "Like Topsy," Hays' leaderette concluded, "it grewed."

Before the feast day, Dorian and Punchie met frequently at the Joint Committee. The spirit of Peace and Goodwill was abroad. After the final meeting, Hay asked Dorian to lunch at the Alcides.

He went, expecting overtures; but the conversation never even remotely touched the important. For a wonder, they talked very little shop. There was sufficient common ground, reminiscences of former days, to keep things flowing on an easy, casual course. As a chance aside, they lighted on the Shakespeare-Bacon controversy. Punchie was, as usual, amusing and illuminating.

"For my part," he said, "just as I believe in a personal

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devil, so I believe, with all due respect to Mr. Hall Caine, in the personal Shakespeare."

"But do you really believe in a personal devil?" Dorian asked, laughing.

"Most assuredly. In our line of life, have we not the proofs daily, and nightly, before us? *Si monumentum requiris, circumspice.*"

"Nor is our line of life singular," Dorian replied, "if it comes to that."

"Pessimist," said Punchie. "Have a liqueur with your coffee, and remember the good work we are doing at present. Our friend the devil can surely have no hand in that."

"I wonder," Dorian began doubtfully.

"*Incorrigible* pessimist," said Mr. Punchie Hay in a tone of mock reproach. "You take life too seriously. Follow me—go lightly."

"I should hardly mistake you for a frivolous person."

"Yet such is the case. I am utterly and entirely frivolous. But for that, the wind would now be whistling over my unhallowed grave."

"Punchie"—Dorian reverted unconsciously to the old nickname—"you are the devil."

"Not nearly accomplished enough, my dear Stepney. There is too much of the beautiful and ineffectual angel still in my composition."

"I should not say ineffectual."

"From you, that is a compliment indeed." Punchie bowed.

These two Esaus, who had sold their birthright for a mess of very dubious pottage, bandied sardonic gibes for another half-hour. Unrefreshed, yet with a new

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insight, they remarked, quite erroneously, that it was a good afternoon and departed, each to his own place.

As he went, Dorian understood clearly for the first time why Potiphar had comforted himself so liberally with the good things of this life. He almost regretted that his own temperament held him aloof from such solace. Potiphar, it was true, had begun to pay the penalty, but he had enjoyed a longish run, and who should say he had not been wise? There had been times when Dorian had reproached himself for not doing what he might to keep Potiphar a little in hand. There had been abundant opportunity, but a strange hesitancy intervened. He did not care to trace it to its real source. He was not his brother's keeper. If Potiphar chose to kill himself, it was nobody's business. Besides, as Dorian now understood, Potiphar had been wise in his generation. He had seen the hollowness of the game, not in the same poignant way as Dorian, pricked by the mocking Punchie, now saw it, but in his degree old Golightly had also heard the Everlasting No. Therefore had he been merry, because of to-morrow!

But the final to-morrow, with its possibilities, was a little delayed. With care, the physicians said, Potiphar would still be good for something. But he must go circumspectly. Worry and shocks must be avoided, at all costs.

Dorian prepared to fling himself into the breach. He had much at stake. Fears that he might find himself one day supplanted by the son of the House he had few, for he had taken accurately the measure of Osric's foot.

It would never fill the workaday Golightly shoe. So, at any rate, Dorian read the omens, and looked with

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curious eyes into the future. Meanwhile, the present held indications that a wise man could not afford to neglect. They were complicated, but not without their own interest and fascination.

END OF BOOK THE SECOND

BOOK III.
THE END

CHAPTER I

THE WISE MAN MISCALCULATES

“**L**IFE,” said Kitty, making a little grimace at herself in the glass, “is rather a fraud.” She accused life good-humouredly enough, for the time of bitterness was not yet, although all had not gone quite as she had hoped. The twenties were drifting away, certainly, but that to the modern woman is not a very dreadful thing, for she has learned that the thirties, properly led up to, are the years of supreme fascination. The crudities of girlhood have fallen away, experience has lent balance and fineness, and physically, where there has been no futile fretting over the lapse of time, the wise spinster finds her greatest opportunity in the fourth decade.

The one root of bitterness had lain in Solomon Rheingold, and there Kitty recognised a tactical mistake on her part. Whole-hearted *camaraderie*, however delightful in itself, does not bring a man to the point of useful action. Solomon had been content to drift. Kitty amused him; she was a pleasant interlude in other amusements, she was always there, ready to be the charming companion of a leisure hour. Her funny gang of quasi-geniuses tickled Solomon’s benevolent curiosity. He was acceptable at tea-parties, for he knew all about the things that interested Kitty’s court. He knew, in fact, a good deal more than many of the gifted

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ones themselves, but he never allowed his superior wisdom to jar on the company. They did not indeed suspect that it was superior. Oh, wise Solomon!

Kitty knew; but she never told. In a sense she stood apart from her circle. She did not "do things," and for that they respected her, slaves of the lamp as they all were more or less. But they loved as well as looked up to her, for was she not a good fairy? Lynette Holiday's liking had become adoration after Kitty had proved influential with a stony-hearted editorial world. Lynette herself had fulfilled Miss Swillet's expectations; old Mrs. Pringle had been gradually sent to limbo, otherwise the workhouse, and the younger, fresher inventions of Miss Holiday now moved the girl readers of the *Flapper* to smiles and tears as regularly as Thursday came round. Dorian's restricted price was a fortune to Lynette. She was independent, like her beloved Kitty.

Her beloved Kitty, meanwhile was wondering how long she would be independent. The three thousand was within measurable distance of an end. Certain economies in dress and a politic restriction of hospitality might keep things afloat for a little longer, but the day of doom was imminent—unless—— It had not been possible to play the game strictly to budget estimate. She had allowed herself a merry six years at a definite price per annum. At eight-and-twenty she would resign bachelor-girlhood gracefully, with something in hand for her trousseau. But, alas! the *va et vient* of a quasi-fashionable life, a life of sudden emergences from obscurity to enjoy the play and sup in public, to lunch one's friends and dress as the mode required, had made

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a fixed annual expenditure impossible. The period of three figures had been reached, and the digit in the hundreds column was deplorably shrunk. She had had a run, and a good run, for her money, but at the end, if there should be no kill! She had given herself too generously. A little aloofness would have been wise. Well, there was no use sighing. Anything might happen, any day. But wisdom counselled some definite action. Things did not happen of themselves.

As Kitty pondered, there entered to her Solomon, and with him a fleeting gleam of hope. Too wise to adopt sudden coquetry, Kitty, nevertheless, planned to withdraw herself a little, to be naturally preoccupied, not quite so much the facile comrade of an idle hour. Rheingold's manner, too, she fancied was a little altered; he seemed to have something to say, to be beating about the bush. Her instinct did not err. Solomon had reached a point of new departure, for he had come to the end of certain amusements that, unknown to Kitty, had kept him on one definite plane through all these years of light companionship. These amusements, whatever they were, had really been a bulwark against a contingency for which Kitty was not prepared. Her heart, though wayward, was innocent. Her aim, if worldly, had been single.

"My dear girl," said Solomon, after various irrelevancies, "I hope you won't be offended at what I'm going to say."

"Very likely I shall."

"Then I had better hold my tongue."

"Far better; but you won't. I never knew a man yet who could deny himself a prepared speech. But,

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believe me, prepared speeches, to a woman, are the greatest mistake."

Solomon smiled. "What does the great Montrose say? —

" 'He either fears his fate too much
Or his desert is small,
Who fears to put it to the touch
To gain or lose it all.' "

Kitty blushed and trembled. This sentimental vein looked like business — at last. Oh, Solomon, Solomon Slow!

Business it seemed to be, but at first not of the sort she dreamed

"The affair is delicate, very, and only our long and close friendship, my dear Kitten, would excuse my making use of confidential knowledge ——"

Kitty looked up quickly. "I don't quite understand," she said. "Please say plainly what you mean. I dislike mystery."

Solomon cleared his throat, and moved uneasily. Had he caught a Tartar? Kitty had never given him any reason to fear that the Tartar lay below; but Solomon's wide experience of women prepared him for anything. He saw that the direct course was necessary. It was in for a penny in for a pound now, in many ways.

"You mayn't know, Kitty, that I'm a partner — a predominant partner — in the house where you bank."

"Indeed. Well, my account isn't overdrawn, is it? It may be your business, I don't know, but I dislike your prying into my affairs."

"Gently, little woman, gently. I did not pry. But while I was investigating quite another matter, I hap-

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pened to notice your account, and something peculiar about it led me to take a second look, and a third. Kitty, my dear, in all these years you've never paid in a red cent. Tell me, have you been living on your capital?"

Kitty tapped the floor with her toe. For a moment she felt like open rebellion. Then she conquered her annoyance. His interest was at least promising. It might not be perfectly delicate, but she could not afford to alienate Rheingold.

She nodded, a little ungraciously.

"It was not prudent, not prudent. Well, we must start afresh ——"

"Start afresh?"

"Yes, only a little better."

"Are you out of your senses?"

"Never more in them. Next time you see your pass-book, Kitty, the credit side will stand where it did when you began ——"

"My dear Solo, it's quite out of the question."

"Why should it be? There would only be one little condition ——"

Again Kitty trembled and looked down. Victory! Out of the unexpected.

"And that is, Solo?"

"A little readjustment of our relations. Oh, Kitty, my darling ——" Solomon took her hand — "You may think I have been long in speaking, but there were obstacles. Now, however, the way is clear, dear girl, to happiness — Why should it not be?"

Something in his tone alarmed her. She withdrew her hand.

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"What is it you ask, Solo?"

"Yourself, dearest. We live in a free world, Kitty, a world that takes small account of conventions. We have been friends, without reproach, so long; we shall be better friends, I hope, and no one need be a penny the wiser. You shall keep your independence — increase it, if you care ——"

Kitty's brain whirled, then grew steady. Her first impulse had been to rise at him with whips and scorns. But that would be absurd melodrama, like the heroine of old-fashioned novels. After all, Solomon was an average man of the world. She had, perhaps, by her unconventionality, led him to think he was on safe ground. She had played with the unconventional, and here was her reward. Poor Solomon! It was hard lines for him. She would let him down lightly. If he went, it would be rather regrettable. Still, there was no choice. Up to a certain point her unconventionality held good. After that, no.

"I take it," she said coolly, "that the name at the top of that page in your ledger would still remain Miss Katherine Adderley?"

Solomon's voice grew thick. Kitty had never appealed to him so much as at this moment. It was awkward, but he couldn't lose her now. He must take the plunge.

"Not at all, my dear, not at all," he began; but Kitty cut him short.

"Solo, you're a humbug! Oh, my dear man, if it had been your intention you'd have begun differently. Why couldn't you have been honest? If you'd come fair and square with your back-handed proposal, Heaven knows I might have said 'yes,' even to that; for a

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woman's heart is a strange, unaccountable thing, and I liked you, Solo; but this back-hander, alas! has done for you. Now, not even if you asked me to marry you, would I consent. So there's the end of it. No, there's no more to be said."

Solomon took up his hat. "I'm sorry, Kitty. I suppose it's good-bye for good."

"Now, there you're equally absurd. What have you done that any ordinary man, not over-troubled with scruples, wouldn't have done in a similar case? Sit down, Solo. You've asked the impossible, as it turns out, and made the possible impossible; but I'm not outraged. I've been a silly fool in many ways, perhaps I was a silly fool not to pin you down to your amended offer, but we'd only have been miserable, beginning on these lines. I don't judge you by any accepted standard of morals, Solo, for you haven't got any. If you care still to have me treat you as a friend as before, let's forget this, bury it, regard it as something that never was."

Rheingold looked at Kitty in amazement. He was disappointed more bitterly than he had thought possible, for he had come to this adventure in the spirit of pastime. Disappointment stung him to an unusual sincerity.

"Kitty, marry me, I implore you. Yes, let's bury my blunder, dear, and take a new offer, from my heart. I can't live without you."

"No, Solo, no. You think you're sincere, but I know you, too well. It's only a pose of sentiment. There was only one way with me: a straightforward offer one way or the other. Remember, I don't say I'd have taken the other offer, but made whole-heartedly, there's

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no saying. Well, that's over and done with. Oh, you men, you men, how little you know us!"

"My dear, there are no two of you alike."

"We all like plain dealing in these matters. Solo, you laid a trap for me. It wasn't cricket. Aren't you a teeny bit ashamed of yourself?"

"I thought I wasn't to be judged by any standard of morals. Oh, you women, you women, how little you know of logic!"

"Logic hasn't helped you much here, Solo. If you'd had one ounce of womanly intuition, you'd have come off better. However, we'll say no more. May I give you some tea?"

The wise man was wise enough to understand that he must make no difference. There would be a difference, that was inevitable, but "be it not seen on either of our brows," he recalled Drayton's sonnet, smiled, made amusing small talk, and took his tea when it came. After a decent interval he departed, with a worse flea in his ear than any reproaches could have set buzzing. He knew not how he should find his way back.

Well, Kitty thought, at any rate Solo is equal to a difficult situation. How strange, though, that such a clever man should have muffed the most difficult of all. He thought it easy, I suppose, that was why.

Some natural tears she dropped, but wiped them soon. She would require all her clearness of vision now. "Gambler!" she cried to her image as she dressed to go out. Well, it's the penalty of beginning to gamble. And there's as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it.

With that reflection she went towards her own Lon-

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don, and not caring how she turned, found herself at last among the afternoon crowds in Bond Street. She liked to imagine herself a part of the great world. She looked like a part of it in her dainty clothes. May was at hand, the season at its opening, the weather fair, London all smiles. Kitty, for all her anxieties, yielded to optimism.

She stopped to look at a jeweller's window. A young man stood at her elbow. As she turned away she looked at him. He too looked, and raised his hat.

"How do you do, Kitty? What ages since I've seen you!"

Behind the young man's face she read the boy's. She held out her hand.

"How do you do, Osric I hardly knew you at first."

"I saw you didn't, but I wasn't going to let you pass."

"That was nice of you."

Before they got any farther, Potiphar, leaning heavily on his stick, came out of the shop. Kitty was rather shocked at his frailness. He greeted her with his old heartiness.

"Ah, Kitty, my dear, how are you this long time? Glad to see you. You never come to see us now. Well, how goes it, how goes it?"

"Quite all right, thank you." Potiphar noticed that she did not ask for Amelia.

"Still Miss Adderley, eh?" Potiphar asked, with the privilege of age.

"Still, Mr. Golightly."

"Dear me! What are all the young men thinking about?"

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"Themselves, no doubt."

"Yes, yes. That's the way of young men nowadays. If they really knew how to consider themselves, they'd do better. D'ye hear, Osric? It's all what you get to eat and drink now, or where you get a good game or a good shoot. And the nice girls are left high and dry." Potiphar laughed genially. He was caught on the rebound. There had been a row that morning over extravagance. Amelia had played up to an angry father, and had brought him round. Osric had promised to amend. Father and son reconciled went out for an afternoon's shopping of the masculine order. Potiphar had bought a trinket for Amelia, and certain things the prodigal urgently desired before he went up again for summer term, now at hand.

Kitty, not altogether charmed by Potiphar's humour, made haste to go, refusing an offer of tea, although she could very well have enjoyed it, for her early cup with Rheingold had been perfunctory.

"Do come, Kit—Miss Adderley," Osric pleaded, boggling at the Christian name. Somehow the usage of little boyhood, when he had rather adored Kitty, as little boys adore big girls, had become impossible. He was a man now, and she was a woman, a young woman; and yet, not quite a young woman. He made a mental calculation. Well, she didn't look it, and she was ripping, so *chic*. Why didn't she come to see them, nowadays? The governor had given no invitation, only a general reproach.

Kitty was not to be moved. She went up towards Oxford Street. Father and son walked slowly the other way. The young man wanted some new poetry books.

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"Well, well," said Potiphar, with indulgent contempt, "but you're too fond of that kind of small beer, Osric. Read something old and solid: Macaulay, say."

"I'm reading a paper to the Pater Club next term on the latest developments of English verse."

"Umph," said Potiphar. "You're a dillytanty, Osric. And in its way, it seems to be just every bit as expensive as if you were a big sporting man. Your rooms, by the way, reminded of a gay lady's, last week-end I ran up to see you. And those chaps I met—Pho! However, we mustn't quarrel again to-day, my boy. I suppose I'm old-fashioned. Let's take a cab. I'm more tired than I thought."

"Curious," he continued as they drove along, "curious our meeting Kitty. Wonder how she gets along. Nice girl, but queer in some ways. Your mother somehow took an ill-will to her. Thought she wasn't quite a person to encourage. Looks all right, though. Strange that she hasn't hooked a man. If she'd been of a suitable age, she'd have been a nice wife for you, ha, ha! Quite the proper thing, too, the two families being so closely connected formerly, you know. But her old father played the fool, Osric, in the end. I fear poor Kitty isn't too well off, but she keeps up appearances wonderfully. Well, single women can get along on little, if they have sense, and contrivance. Keeps her looks, doesn't she? She must be seven or eight and twenty if she's a day."

"Does she do anything—for a living, I mean?"

"Not that I know. She may, however. Your mother told me she took up with a crowd of artists and writers, musicians and actors, and all that sort of riff-raff. She

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used to be a good musician. Old Hiram was fearfully proud of her, poor man. By the by, your mother had some story that she was very much in with our dear friend Rheingold. Perhaps she may work for the enemy, Osric, in some obscure way. It's wonderful how many frail cockle-shells houses such as Golightly's and others keep afloat. We're public benefactors, my dear boy, and our left hand never knows what our right hand does. Now I come to think of it, Dorian says the *Torch's* musical criticism is extraordinarily well done. If I thought it was Kitty, it might be worth the *Beacon's* while getting her over. It's merely a question of pay. Those people we employ are all alike, venal to the last degree. No loyalty to a faithful old employer. The first chance of bettering themselves and off they go, like dickey-birds, as you will find, Osric, when you come into the office. Never trust one of them, and remember, have no friends in business. It's always a mistake."

"But old Dorian's your friend, pater."

"It has been useful to have him on a friendly footing. That's all, Osric. He is now too deeply committed to the business to desert it. And the friendly footing, as I say, is advantageous in many ways. But I have no sentimental regard for Mr. Dorian Stepney, and the same will be a safe rule for you, Osric, to follow when you come into the fight. A fight it will be, my boy, to keep what your father built up in his best days. And mind you, you're to be boss, ultimately. Even Stepney must play second fiddle to you at last. You're the Golightly, remember."

Osric shrugged his shoulders and looked out of the

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cab window. His father's lecture did not cheer him. Why should he be thrust into a beastly business that only pandered to the mob? The world held fairer things. Why could he not enjoy them? They had the means, supplied by that same vulgar mob: its reasonable service.

Potiphar waited in the cab while Osric bought his books. He had kept one out of the parcel to read as they drove home. His father seized the dainty trifle, glanced through it, snorted, and returned it with the remark:

"Not a brass farthing in this sort of stuff, Osric! Golightly's wasn't built up on such tiddyaddle trash."

"Seumas Kilmainham," Osric replied solemnly, in the voice of one who approaches sacred things, "Seumas Kilmainham is the greatest of our younger poets. He does not write for shekels——"

"He cannot write for nuts, in my humble opinion, and I'm sorry for 'our younger poets.' Now, my dear boy, take my advice, throw this Paddy from Cork and all his kind out of the window, and fit yourself to be your father's worthy successor. Take a practical view of life, and have done with stupid gush. Learn to have manly tastes. One day you'll have, among other duties, to direct the sensible reading public. Look what the *Beacon* has done for literature, art, science, politics, the drama, what not? Look what Golightly's has done to provide pure 'eakthy—healthy reading for the million. Is that nothing? You have a great inheritance, Osric. But mind you, it won't be kept up by your Mr. Seumas Kilmainham or his kidney."

"Kilmainham is the coming man."

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"Eh, what? Well, we'll see him when he comes. And when he really *does* come, when everybody is speaking about him, but not a day before, mind you get him for the *Beacon*, if I'm not above ground. I don't mean that you corner all his stuff, of course, but just one or two things, bright, topical, and to the point, while his boom's at its height. Poetry's a drug, but if there's a *real* boom in a man, even verse is worth payin' for; but not a day longer than the public interest lasts. You can't create public interest. You can only follow it up, give it a loud voice, and then claim to have created it. My word, what a lot of good, sound, free advice I'm giving you to-day! Think well over it; it's all hard-bought, practical experience. You're lucky to have me still at your elbow. Hullo, here we are at home! Don't forget your Kilmainham bird and all the rest of them; but if you're a wise man you'll drop them in the gutter. Don't give the cabman more than two bob."

Potiphar, rather short of breath, got down heavily. Osric, silently enduring, followed him indoors.

Really, the pater was sometimes too terrible. Still, the afternoon had not been without its charms. At a convenient moment, Osric secured his mother's address-book, looked back a long way, found what he wanted, and made a note. Perhaps the information might be long out of date. On the other hand, it might not. He would see.

CHAPTER II

AMELIA LAYS PLANS

IN the amiable foolishness of his undergraduate heart, Osric, during the few days that remained of the Easter Vacation, reached out, with a thrill of curiosity, towards a new adventure. Already a man in his own conceits, a man, as he believed, experienced in various affairs, more or less innocuous, he saw nothing grotesque in his sudden fancy for a girl so much older than himself. The piquant and still youthful charm of Kitty had, he fancied, taken him by storm. He desired her better acquaintance. Tentatively and, as he flattered himself, diplomatically, he had sounded his mother on the subject of Kitty's practical fading out from the Queen's Gate horizon, but either the matter was hopelessly prejudiced, or he had not been diplomatic enough, for he got no satisfaction. Amelia did not exactly snub her son.

"It is curious," she said, "but Kitty must please herself. I asked her often enough, but she seemed not to care about coming here."

Osric did not push the matter farther, but, armed with that old address, he set out secretly on Sunday afternoon upon the quest perilous. He had no fear of any rebuff, for Kitty had been very kind to him when he was a little boy and she was just into long frocks. Now that he was a man she would be glad to see him, if he

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had the luck to find her. He had to ask his way once or twice, for his knowledge of London beyond a certain zone was not extensive and particular.

While the son pursued his knight-errantry, the father sat at home, pondering many things in his heart. More clearly than ever Potiphar saw the End. He was not, to be sure, a condemned man exactly, but his illness had brought him to a point where he desired assurances of the future. Foreboding that somehow Osric would disappoint him gripped his heart. He was ready to make allowances, if only he saw an underlying possibility of ultimate rightness, but that was hard to detect. He feared that the boy had no grit. People, especially women, said he was charming, a nice boy, some even called him clever and cultivated. That might be, but Potiphar did not relish the signs of cultivation. Horrible, if son of his should be merely effeminate, a dabbler in trifles, like those twopenny poetry books, those choice, somewhat unintelligible engravings, and the general appointments of his rooms. Those rooms were a sight, and the bills, the bills! Potiphar need not have seen them for some years to come, but on his last paternal visit to the place of unpractical views and methods, he had demanded to know the price. He was for dismantling the beautiful shrine, out of hand, and would have sent back the "stuff," as the irresponsible purchases of an infant before the law, but Amelia would not permit it. Again her blandishments and tears prevailed. Potiphar paid, and hoped for the best. In return, the young man refused to dabble in shares for the benefit of his income. It wasted his time, he pleaded, and his father grudgingly abandoned the brilliant experiment. Plainly

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the boy had no turn for business. He was like his mother, a sentimental creature with a taste for imaginative literature, but the wrong kind of taste, Potiphar feared. After all, Amelia's gift had been valuable only because Golightly's found and knew how to use it. That gift was not necessary for Osric. What he needed was the Golightly instinct for using the brains of others. And nature by an ungrateful freak seemed to have withheld that precious thing from Osric. It was hard on a man who had done well for himself, in the world, and latterly in spite of the world, against fearful odds. The odds were growing keener every day. Was Golightly's, that vast machine, still doing well? Oh, yes, certainly, certainly, and would do better. It had need. Potiphar had made certain secret manœuvres, in order to screw this year's dividend up to the same point as the last. It was rotten finance, but he couldn't give Stingo, Rheingold, and Hay the laugh. Mere manœuvres, mind you; he had not touched the company's capital, so there was nothing exactly criminal, except the little wangle of the profit account. Well, well, next year, next year, and for future years? The boy was young, it was too soon to despair. Who said despair?

Potiphar no longer took counsel with Amelia about Osric. That, in one way, made his burden heavier; but, on the other, the wife of his bosom held no clue to comfort, amid the discussion of the disagreeable. She was so bound up in her idol, that no word of wisdom or enlightenment could be expected from her. Potiphar, therefore, brooded in silence, upon a frowning future.

"You are dull, Pharie," she remarked that Sunday afternoon.

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"Not at all, my dear, not at all." He roused himself with obvious effort.

"You are really very much stronger."

"Oh, much."

"This term will be a very gay time for Osric. I hope you'll feel equal to coming up with us during Eights week."

"Us?"

"Yes. Elizabeth Welshpoole and I have been making plans. Like two foolish old women we have been laying our heads together about our children. Don't you think, Pharie, it would be charming if dear Osric and Hilda Thlangothlen were to take a fancy to each other? quite romantic. Of course it couldn't be thought of for some time to come, but opportunity is everything. Lady Hilda Golightly sounds rather nice, doesn't it?"

"She's got no money, Amelia."

"That doesn't matter, surely."

"It's always an advantage to go where money is."

"Certainly. Elizabeth Welshpoole knows that. And, Pharie, by the time it was ready to happen, perhaps your party might be in power again. Do you think, do you think ——?"

"I think, Amelia, I'll live and die plain P. Golightly. I'm done with that old humbug. Besides, they'd never go beyond a baronetcy, at the outside, and, frankly, my dear, I can't run to heavy party subscriptions any longer. I had my chance and I refused. I'd need to do something handsome to work the oracle again, supposing the present tenpenny set of pettifoggers got kicked

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out, and honest men came in. Besides, a baronetcy's no use to you!"

Amelia's thoughts flashed forward to the one day inevitable. The disabilities of Sir Potiphar were lost in the charms of Sir Osric. But her husband gave her no quarter. Before she could frame an amendment, he continued almost angrily: "No, Amelia, that's all past and done with! I'll never lift a finger again to get a title."

He took up a newspaper, and eclipsed himself symbolically behind it. Amelia saw that the incident, for the time being, had better be considered closed. Perhaps, if the Thlangothlen affair prospered, Pharie might think otherwise. It was a pity he had shown so little sympathy. Girls like Hilda weren't so easy to find, that is to say, girls like Hilda with mothers who could overlook the Golightly lack of quarterings, for the sake of the Golightly pieces of eight. As for Potiphar's idea that Osric should marry money, absurd! Pharie was a little unaccountable at times, since his illness, poor man! Well, he had to be humoured. At the last, and under the right persuasion, he generally came round.

By the time the elder Golightlys had got thus far, their son, vibrant with adventure, was ringing the bell of Miss Adderley's flat.

CHAPTER III

RECOGNITIONS AND INTRODUCTIONS

A BRILLIANT performance on the piano ceased abruptly at the whirr of the bell, and it was Kitty in person who opened the door to Osric. That young lady, ever sufficient unto herself, concealed surprise and welcomed the youth as if his visit had been entirely expected. He, the victim of many delightful emotions, found himself presently in the midst of Miss Adderley's court, which was usually rather thronged on Sunday afternoon. Osric had not counted upon this; in some ways it was disappointing, but he recognised compensations. This free and easy company promised amusement; in a flash Osric, who was not lacking in observation, grasped its slight *bizarrierie*, its irreproachable tone. These young people might be nobodies, but they carried themselves as if they were of importance and the potential somebodies among them justified the assurance of the rest.

It is hardly possible to enter any company, even the most unlikely, without meeting some known person.

"Hullo, Orgies," said a delicate, lazy voice from a dim corner, beside the piano.

Osric looked up. "Hullo, Bounder," he replied casually. "How are you? Going strong?"

The gentleman addressed as Bounder admitted that he was. He belied alike his confession and his name,

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which latter was, in fact, a deliberate perversion of the truth, contrived by some Craven wit to suggest a heightened contrast. For Mr. Algernon Charles Addleshaw's nickname suited him as little as a bull a china shop. Addleshaw was, indeed, a piece of human Dresden ware, the choicest poet of the college for the time being, the *arbiter elegantiarum* to the set with which Osric had cast in his lot. It was said that he modelled himself upon Petronius, with whose works and day (or rather nights) he professed a profound acquaintance. Cynics said he was obliged to translations, but they were outsiders. As for his poetry, it was undeniably fine; only the Master, that hopeless old fossil Seneschal, refused to believe in it. He had even sent for Addleshaw to reason with him on that head, and to hint that certain fugitive verses were subversive of good morals. According to Addleshaw's account of the interview, the Master had come off second best. Their epigrammatic conversation was treasured by the set as Addleshaw's masterpiece of dialectic. It was even recorded for posterity, and it read well. What had really happened was much briefer. Mr. Seneschal had merely alluded to the offending print and added: "Any more of this, Addleshaw, and I send you down. Don't let it occur again. Good morning."

Addleshaw, who had reasons of his own for not desiring martyrdom, confined his effusions thenceforward to MS. "It was so much more distinguished not to print," he explained. Publication was the last refuge of vulgarity. The precious sheets were therefore passed from hand to hand, reverently. His great effort, "In Praise of Lyric Scents," and its companion, "The

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Cosmetic Hour-Glass," were voted amazing and too sacred to be entrusted to any leaden-fingered compositor. There were brutish creatures at Craven who said that Addleshaw wanted kicking, which was all very well, but nobody kicked him. Wherein Craven came short somewhat of profession. But it is the way of the world that its Addleshaws usually go scot free. When they are kicked the resulting outcry usually does more harm than good. Addleshaw belonged to a limited class for which Fate seems to have ordained triumphant immunity in this world. How their impudence will fare in the next is a nice speculation, but it is at least certain that the devil will not suffer them to be too clever for him. That supreme genius is jealous of his prerogatives.

Mr. A. C. Addleshaw was not exactly of Kitty's community. But her world touched many worlds, and the exquisite versifier had been brought along that afternoon by a casual friend. Kitty was always glad to see new people, and the elegant Addleshaw fell easily into his place in the company. He had that assumption of superiority which commands respect from those who know themselves to be above the herd. Here was another choice spirit, a rightful claimant to the world's admiration. The world's admiration, of course, was not worth having; still, such gifted persons ought to receive it, together with a proper worldly provision. The elect did not try to reconcile the two positions. Their method was simpler. When the genius became popular, they simply had no further use for him, and went on to the next obscurity.

Kitty's preoccupations as hostess threatened to rob

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Osric of any prolonged talk with her. In a very few seconds she had separated him from Addleshaw, and introduced him to Electra Palgrave. Osric knew the name. It had appeared now and then beneath poems which Addleshaw had pronounced "better, if possible, than Sappho." When Osric lifted up his eyes and looked at Electra Palgrave in the flesh, he had the sensation of one who has been hurled sheer o'er the crystal battlements of heaven. Miss Palgrave was of an uncertain antiquity, raddled, withered, untidily draped in a fond travesty of the classic manner, her nails, alas! — but of these disappointments no more. Osric had to screw his courage to take the hand Electra offered. But then — oh, then, the disabilities faded as Miss Palgrave talked. There was no denying her intelligence. She was perhaps a little *démodée*, a survival of another day, but still amusing. And she was not afraid to be wicked.

"You are a friend of dear Algernon's," she said. "He is a poet, is he not? No fetters of morality on his wings."

"He and morality were born in different planets," Osric replied, plagiarising a speech of Addleshaw's own. "Their orbits will never cross."

"Why should they?" Electra asked, gazing into space. "Algernon is beautiful," she sighed. "That is sufficient. His poetry, he tells me, is banned by dons; dons! What *are* dons? A species of cave-dweller, I suppose. Do they fight for bones among themselves?"

Osric listened with a curious thrill. This also was a saying of Addleshaw's. How that man influenced people! He was a wonder.

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"They are hardly alive enough to be cave-dwellers," he answered, still drawing on reminiscences of the divine Addleshaw. "Fossils rather."

"It is good for them to have Algernon among them for a time, unworthy though they are. One day they will learn what they have despised. He will be a second Shelley. Craven will give him a monument of marble recumbent, when he has outsoared the shadow of their night."

This, as far as Osric knew, was Electra's own. Addleshaw had not in any public utterance gone so far as yet.

"And are you, too, a poet?" she asked, looking her undisguised admiration at Osric's perverse grace. "One need hardly ask."

Golightly blushed becomingly. "Oh, not a poet. But interested in poetry and all that sort of thing." As he spoke he blushed deeper. "That sort of thing" sounded wrong somehow. He could never quite get his tongue to behave. It must be some hereditary taint. His expression was never perfect. Miss Palgrave must have noticed. She did, and seemed to shrink.

"It is good to be interested," Electra murmured, "in that sort of thing." Her tone suggested faint parody and protest. "Poetry alone matters. You could not have a fairer guide than dear Algernon. Fortunate young man to be his friend!"

"Oh, the Bounder's a good old sort ——" he began, and stopped, stammering —

Miss Palgrave froze. "The who ——?"

"Oh, that's what we call him at Craven, you know ——"

"You ought to be ashamed of yourselves. Infamous!"

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I must warn Algernon to beware where he casts his pearls ——”

Osric looked at Electra with puzzled eyes. Was she serious? Evidently. He tried to frame some palliative phrases, but none would rise to his lips. Miss Palgrave looked over and beyond him. Then she clutched her velvet bag and rose.

“I fear,” she said to Kitty, “I must go, Katherine dear. I promised to look in at the Muggletons to see Raymond’s great new picture, ‘The Rape of Helen,’ and it is getting late. Come, Algernon.”

The obedient Addleshaw departed in her train. The door closed.

“Bless us and keep us!” said a healthy young civil servant, handing tea to one of the girls, the prettiest in the room.

The girl looked up with a twinkle of humour. They both laughed. The girl caught Kitty’s eye. Kitty fought with inclination for a moment, for good manners’ sake, and then laughed also. She caught sight of Osric, sitting disconsolate.

“Come over here, Osric,” she said. “I hope Miss Palgrave didn’t take your breath away? She’s a genius, you know, a real genius, and therefore eccentric. You mustn’t mind her.”

“So I saw,” said Osric, crossing over. Kitty made room for him. Now his chance had come. He brightened. But in a moment some other people entered the already overcrowded room. The hostess drifted away, but first she introduced Osric to the pretty girl, Lynette Holiday.

Lynette had about her a quaint suggestion of the

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artistic, but it remained only a suggestion. She was exquisitely sweet and fresh, very young, too, wholesome, fair, and natural. Osric found himself in company where he was not overpowered, and Lynette hit upon a congenial theme, their hostess. Evidently Lynette adored her. Osric played a good second fiddle, claimed to have known Kitty since he was so high, and praised her with heart and voice. He forgot about framing his phrases, he forgot the Addleshaw-Palgrave incident, he forgot that social exigencies had denied him the pleasure of his hostess's exclusive company, he only knew that now he was enjoying himself. After Kitty, they talked about nothing quite pleasantly.

"Would you mind telling me your name?" Lynette asked at length. "One never catches the name when one is introduced."

Osric declared his lineage.

"What Golightlys?" Lynette continued, with a sudden interest. "*The Golightlys?*"

"If you mean the newspaper people, yes. I'm the son."

"Oh, how interesting!" Lynette cried. "You know I work for Golightlys?"

"Really? I shouldn't have thought you worked at all!"

"Have to, worse luck." Lynette made a charming grimace.

"Hard lines!" Osric said heartily. "What do you do?"

"Oh, little stories." Lynette blushed. This was not her true vocation. She wondered why she had let her tongue wag to this nice-looking boy. He seemed kind, however. She thought she had overheard him talking

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poetry to Miss Palgrave, who had once praised some verses of Lynette's. Miss Palgrave had imagined she saw in them something that Lynette never intended, something of which the girl was happily entirely ignorant. But Lynette took the praise simply and was grateful. Although Electra was a sad old guy, she did count for something. Perhaps the boy might be interested too. He might even help her to more congenial work than the *Flapper* stories. Lynette, taught in a hard school, had learned all the obscure little author's subterfuges, the eager grasplings at every straw of opportunity, every shred of personal influence. No man, connected even remotely with the wielders of editorial thunder, but knows these wire-pulling applications, futile, melancholy things, where they are not aggressively offensive.

"The women," Hay used to say, "are the worst. They cajole A to speak to B, to ask C to implore D (the great god) to direct E, his minion, to write the required puff, or give the desired appointment, or publish the enclosed photograph of X, who has written this or that epoch-making novel. What the devil the face of any striving writer matters to the public no one has yet discovered. If he be already eminent or newly dead the public may perchance desire to see whether he is or was an Adonis or a Silenus. Let it have that fleeting gratification by all means, but how any unknown scribe can ardently desire the mere publication of his portrait passeth the wit of discerning man to say. It cannot be the hope of material profit; for if the books do not commend themselves, the author's face will hardly advocate them. But the unceasing round of scramble, intrigue, scratch-my-back, flatter-my-editor pushfulness whirls its mad way

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unchecked, has become indeed such a common-place of life that none notice its hideous indecency." And to its insidious practice Lynette, at the lightest hint of a chance, now lent herself, with hardly a qualm.

"I write stories," she said, "but my *real* work is poetry."

Osrice cudgelled his brains. He could not remember anything by anybody called Holiday.

"Tell me the name of your book ——" he began.

"Oh, I've never published a book of verse, only fugitive pieces, in the *Grove* principally ——"

"The *Grove*! By Jove, I remember. 'Pan's Love,' wasn't that yours? Awfully pretty, quite beautiful, in fact. I loved it. You *must* do a book. And won't you show me more of your work?"

"With pleasure, if you like. I wish I could get more of my best work published."

"It's not easy."

"I wonder whether you know anybody, Mr. Golightly, who would look at my little things?"

"Alas! I fear I don't." Osrice spoke warily, for already in his first year at Craven he had, as a scion of the House of Golightly, come to know the familiar gambit of the pushing literary aspirant. "You see, Golightly's doesn't run a weekly review, a critical literary review, you know. What is suitable for the *Grove* is scarcely what my father wants. By the way, if it's a fair question, which of our papers do you write for?"

Lynette blushed. The *Flapper*, she confessed quietly.

Osrice tingled in sympathy with the girl's faint shame. He could get no farther than "Oh ——"

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"But it's good grist to the mill," Lynette made haste to add, fearful lest her veiled tone of disparagement should have been a tactical blunder. "And I'm lucky to have found it. Miss Adderley spoke to Mr. Stepney for me."

"Good old Dorian! He's no end of a decent soul!"

"I never met him, but I'd like to. I owe him a lot."

"He used to play with verses himself once, and was very good, I hear, until business swallowed him up. It's got to swallow me up too, one day, worse luck," he added, ingenuously ranking himself with martyred genius.

"You don't like the idea?"

"I hate it." Then he pulled himself up. It was his turn to blush. What was there about this little girl that had hurled him into sudden self-revelation? It must be her spiritual sympathy. Yet she was not intense and precious. Although she was a real poet, she spoke like other people, and he had found it quite easy to be himself with her, and to blunder along in his usual faulty way, without fear or *arrière pensée*. He never could live up, or rather speak up, to his æsthetic consciousness. Witness his awful failure with Miss Palgrave. With her it didn't matter. Very few of the set, intellectual though they were, were altogether fastidious or cared to be fastidious in speech. The Bounder alone was perfectly choice, their model and their despair. But this nice, natural girl made him forget all that. He wished he could help her, but could not see any possible way. Taught by one or two bitter

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experiences, in earlier and rasher days, he held his tongue.

When Kitty at last could give him a few minutes of her bright presence he was almost sorry. But then it was to see Kitty he had come, and she was certainly very charming, older than little Miss Holiday, too, and more piquant to a man of sensibility and experience. Young girls, Addleshaw taught tautologically, were crude, unripe fruit. According to that ascetic philosopher, the sex generally was a mistake; but the rare exceptions, about whose intelligence there could be no doubt — Electra, for example — might be cultivated to profit. One might even get an idea from them now and then. Addleshaw had got several. When Osric had detected, as he thought, the Algernon note in her speech, and had thought her a borrower, he put the saddle on the wrong horse. Yes, after all, quite young girls were crude. He resigned himself to Kitty, and glowed in her sunshine. She seemed really glad that he had come. Losing his head a little, and anxious to prove devotion, he even hinted in a very young manner that his visit was strictly *sub rosa*. Kitty rose to the occasion.

"Right O!" she said, with a flash Osric thought all kindly understanding. "Mum's the word. When I meet your mother next, keep your mind easy. It was nice of you to come. You'll come again soon?"

"I'm going up again in a day or two, but could you come to lunch with me somewhere before then, Kitty?"

"With pleasure. How would Wednesday do?"

"All right. Do you know Kathner's?"

"I do," said Miss Adderley, marvelling at the youth's

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green assumption of her inexperience in the caravanserais of London. "It's in Church Street, Soho, isn't it?"

"Yes. What o'clock?"

"Oh, one o'clock. Every other time is wrong for lunch."

"So it is. I never thought of that before. How original of you! I say, will you — could you persuade Miss Holiday to come too?" He glanced across the room at Lynette.

"Another time," Kitty replied, decisively taking the upper hand. "On Wednesday, Osric, I want you all to myself. I've scarcely had a word with you to-day for all these people. Till Wednesday, then ——"

Osric said good-bye, scarcely knowing whether his head or his heels had the superior position. After all, girls, even young and youngish girls, were worth attention, in spite of the Bounder's teaching. Osric's experience of two this afternoon had been deliciously pleasant. It was gorgeous to have found dear Kitty again. He had adored her off and on, when he was in knickerbockers, and she a great girl. Now it seemed she was not averse to him. "I must have you all to myself on Wednesday, Osric."

Jove! the excitement of it all! To have conquered a woman, not a mere girl, mind you, though some of them were very sweet, but a woman, at one stroke, and such a woman!

It was enough to make older and wiser heads a little dizzy. The reader's charity is solicited for Mr. Osric Golightly. He will require it all, before the last word of this history is written.

CHAPTER IV

FROM OXFORD TO LONDON

OSRIC, more than ever tossed about by delightfully conflicting emotions, went up for his summer term, and fell at once under the lotus-eating spell of that enchanting season. Perfect weather, the Cher, the Canadian canoe, new and fascinating books, and the agreeable ways of his set, now attuned to the luxury of the time, made the thought of work, if he had ever had any, seem mere foolishness. But the days were not vacant. There was always something to do, and in a whirl of busy idleness he believed that he had found the ideal existence. One thing alone was lacking, but that would come along later, with the advent of Eights week. He wrote many precious epistles in those days, and sometimes he received answers more precious still. True, they were not altogether satisfactory; there was in them an elder-sisterly tone that checked his most intimate impulses; but for all that it could not rob him entirely of the charm of illicit adventure. This, he assured himself, was his first serious affair. In time, the elder-sisterly tone would give place to something more in accordance with his young dreams. And, after all, the difference in mere age did not matter. She was beautiful, and he loved.

He had begged a photograph, which adorned his mantelpiece. To it he addressed his daily orisons. It

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brought him joy. It had also brought him one sorrow. In a careless moment he had praised it to Addleshaw, with veiled confidences.

"Hum," said that philosopher, "yes, she seemed a pleasant person that day Electra took me along; but, my dear Orgies, it is written, 'a man may not marry his grandmother.'"

Osric fidgeted, and found no retort ready. Hurt, he looked out at the window and watered his flowers. The Bounder stole elegantly away, to ask his friends and acquaintance whether they had seen Orgies' grandparent, with whom he was in love. The cryptic question sent a stream of eager visitors to Osric's rooms. Their inquiries, embroidered according to their several ideas of wit, at length caused the removal of the portrait to a more secret shrine. But the grandmother legend died hard. Truly the paths of the devoted lover are rough.

"Look here, Bounder," he said to Addleshaw one evening, "why did you guy me about — that?"

"Guy you! My dear man, I never guyed you. I commended you everywhere. I can conceive nothing more fitting for a young man who would succeed than that he should marry his grandmother. True, it is forbidden, but that is a detail and makes your attachment only the more meritorious. I only wish I saw all young men, if not marrying, at least in love with their grandmother. Think of the safety of such a course, the tranquillity, the immunity from the uncertain whims of the mere crude *jeune fille*."

"But *she's* not old — the lady of the portrait, I mean."

"Orgies, how can you insult your beloved by calling

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her young? Think of all that that implies! Infamous!"

"Well, why did you imply that I couldn't marry her?"

"You misunderstand me. I quoted that piece of ecclesiastical warning merely to show you how I approved your good sense, and to remind you delicately how far your passion had soared above the mere conventions of a stupid world. You must be less literal, my dear Orgies. To be literal is to be an outsider. The more you persuade yourself that this dear lady is your grandmother, the more exquisitely other-worldly will your devotion be."

"Now you're rotting, Bounder."

"I never rot, on serious affairs. Take my blessing, Orgies, and my forgiveness for your unworthy suspicions. Also replace the picture quickly, and when the ungodly gibe about your grandmother, ask which of them has one like her. Be very proud of her, Orgies, as I am proud of you. I had not thought to find such wisdom in one who is still a freshman. My influence, it seems, has not been in vain."

"Your influence?" another voice struck in. "That myth again!"

"Ah, Welsher!" Addleshaw turned to the man who had just entered. "All hail! Who are you that despise myths? They are the only realities."

"Flimsy, flimsy," said Welshpoole. "Yes, Orgies, coffee, please." He helped himself to a cigarette, and lay down on the sofa, where he began to blow smoke rings to the ceiling. "What's the Addler upon to-night, Orger, and how's *la grandmère*?"

For answer, Osric sat on Welshpoole's head. When

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order was restored, the misused guest changed the subject. "Your people will be up for Eights week, I hear, Orger. My beloved mother and sister are coming too. Quite a family party."

"The mater's coming," Osric admitted, "and probably the governor. Old Stepney's going to run up for a night, if he can." He spoke without enthusiasm; for a parental descent threatened complications. He had only that morning heard that someone else proposed to visit Oxford during the fateful week, when hearts rule cheap and undying vows go for a song under the willows."

"Alas!" said Addleshaw, "I am in the Schools this term. Frivolity must know me not. Why tempt me with tales of sweet maternal relatives? To sisters I am indifferent."

"Shut up, you ass. What do Divvers matter to anybody?"

"Greater men than I have been ploughed in Divinity," said Addleshaw piously. "No, my friends, The Acts of the Apostles and two Gospels are my portion. It is well for me that Orgies has not enticed his grandmother up. Look, he blushes. I believe he has persuaded her to shift her maiden camp to the Bardolph, the Mitre, or the bower of some chaste landlady. Is it not so, my Orger? In that case, I am undone. Nothing can save me but the more mature charms of the divine Palgrave. I must write to her! She does not love you, Orgies, so *restez tranquille, mon ami*. She finds you lacking in expression."

"I find her lacking in ablutions," said the persecuted one, stung to resentment.

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Welshpoole, who had heard of Miss Palgrave from Osric, applauded. "In the clout, in the clout!" he cried. "*Euge*, Orger, *euge*. Well done, my son! Oh, bad snubs, Addler, bad snubs!"

"Imperfectly expressed, however, and there the alleged snub vanishes, for the previous point is upheld. But he improves, our Orger. One day he will achieve expression. As for you, Welsher, you are a lord, we do not expect it of you. You have other saving graces, and can turn a sonnet with the most depraved. It is only in conversation that you are flippant and given to slang. Do not try to improve. You are more piquant as you are."

"I never dreamed of improvement, Addler. It would only lead to disaster, in my case. Got any new little books, Orger?"

"One or two." He unlocked a cupboard. "You see I have to keep them out of Wilkins's sight. He might be edified. And an edified scout won't bear thinking about."

Addleshaw smiled with pleased patronage. This was not bad, for Golightly. He did not applaud however. "Let me see," he said, holding out his hand for the precious volumes. "Ah, very choice, very choice, exquisite. No, I don't think Wilkins ought to see those pictures. Do you, Welsher?" He held an open book towards Welshpoole.

"Certainly not. It is a pity that Wilkins, so excellent in many ways, should be so limited in others. I fear he is a sad Goth."

"Ah, the pity of it," sighed Addleshaw. "I once thought of starting a mission to scouts, to promote

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Hellenic studies among them. Think of it, a scout who could do one's prose or verse for one. Invaluable! There was a man at the House in Ruskin's time, I believe, 'Cicero' Cook, or some such name, the 'learned scout,' who did men's themes for them. But we live in less fortunate times. Oxford is going to the dogs, and I must go to my Gospels."

He rose, yawned, looked round Osric's shelves, chose a book or two, without asking leave, and departed with a murmured benediction.

"The Addler is killing," said Welshpoole. "Have you seen his latest?"

"No."

Welshpoole took out a paper, covered with very neat writing, and handed it to Osric.

Golightly, eagerly curious, read to the end.

"Good Heavens!" was his only comment.

"*Quite* so," said the Earl of Welshpoole. . . . "Give me a whisky and soda, Orgies. It's indicated."

They talked lazily for another hour. Suddenly a gust of sound swirled up from the quadrangle.

"Hullo!" said Welshpoole, "a rag."

They were not concerned, but a darting step sounded on the stairs, and the Bounder rushed in. He was strangely excited, almost weird.

"Come along," he said, "and serenade Bones. Wickham had a wine—I looked in on my way back—and now they're out for pleasure."

Already it seemed the serenade had begun. A chorus of "Bones, Bones, Bones," sung to long-drawn notes in an ascending scale, floated up from below. Osric and Welshpoole cantered downstairs.

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The revellers were drawn up in phalanx outside the windows of their victim, an ultra-quiet reading man, whose rooms were on the ground floor.

The first octave ended as the three got outside.

"Bravo!" said Addleshaw: "but we need an instrument. Bring out the Welsher's piano."

The crew tumbled towards Welshpoole's rooms, which were also on the ground floor. The piano, with much bumping, was dragged forth. Addleshaw stood before the keyboard and struck a sonorous chord.

"Now begin, and take the time from me."

Again, full-throated, Bones, Bo-oh-nes, Boh-hi-n-es, ran the gamut. Addleshaw's accompaniment was quite masterly. Welshpoole touched the banjo.

"Now, downwards." They sang again while Wickham beat time with a magnum of champagne, held like an Indian club.

"Give the musical-box a drink," someone suggested.

"Easy all," said Welshpoole. "It's on hire." He sat on the upper lid, but the others, yelling, hauled him down, the neck of the magnum was knocked off, and the libation was poured upon the strings.

Once more, and louder, Bones was invoked in a tumultuous octave.

"Give Bones the rest of the bottle," said a voice.

Crash it went through the window, and shattered the studious electric lamp within. A party broke away and began to kick at Bones's oak. The rest chanted with redoubled vigour, but less precision.

"Bones, are you in bed?" roared one stentor. "Come out, Bones, that we may see you."

"Climb in," said another.

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"Boil Bones!"

"Bones, Bones, Bones, Bones, Bones's Blood in a Bottle!"

One man, greatly uplifted, proposed to perform a strange surgical operation on the body of Bones. The cry was taken up, Addleshaw, to whom the idea seemed to appeal with extraordinary force, leading in a high falsetto, while he thumped the piano.

As it happened, part of the college was in the hands of the British workman. Some part of every college usually is, for some unknown reason. Osric remembered that he had seen a short length of iron drain-pipe near the kitchen door. He called Welshpoole to follow, and ran round to that quarter. Their return with the battering-ram was hailed with delirious applause. The engine was manned, and Bones's oak quivered beneath repeated shocks. To every stroke the engineers sang "Bones!" But oaks are stout, the work threatened to be long.

Suddenly through the archway between the two quadrangles darted a lithe figure, crowned with a college cap.

Those who saw the approach of Discipline fled with a yell. But the battering party within were too pre-occupied to take warning.

The figure stood for a moment at the staircase doorway, mentally recording faces.

"Go to your rooms, gentlemen," a quiet voice said during a lull.

The battering-ram fell from astonished hands!

"Go to your rooms, and all of you come to see me to-morrow immediately after chapel! Take that piano indoors."

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The Dean, curling a contemptuous lip, turned and strode away.

The remnant of Wickham's wine melted into the dusk of the summer night. One or two cheered themselves with a discordant howl or so as they retired. Then silence fell on Craven.

Osric, with a freshman's inexperience, wondered whether he would be sent down.

"Oh, dear, no," said Addleshaw, who had escaped with the first rush, and had returned to Golightly's rooms when the coast was clear. "It's not serious enough for that, Orgies. This is a mild affair. You'll perhaps be gated till the end of term, that's all."

On Osric, in view of his plans for Eights week, this Job's comfort fell heavily.

"You have the devil's own luck, Bounder," he said petulantly.

"He is mindful of his own," Addleshaw replied airily. "Good night, Orgies. Pleasant dreams."

Osric banged his oak viciously, and went to bed.

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The same evening, amid the sanctities of Queen's Gate, Potiphar was closeted with his lieutenant. Dorian had dined quietly with his chief. Amelia had gone to the play with Lady Welshpoole and her daughter Hilda. Golightly was not permitted to keep any but the most respectable hours, and he did not yet go out at night. Dorian noted the hand and voice of the physician in Potiphar's Spartan fare.

"A great nuisance, Dorian," said Potiphar, eyeing his toast and water; "but I'm coming back to my usual."

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"All in good time, I hope," Dorian replied heartily.

They rose from the table and adjourned to the library. Dorian, out of consideration for the average sensual man's privations, refused to smoke.

Their talk was anxious. The affairs of the House were showing a steady decline. The golden touch seemed to have deserted Golightly. The enemy was more than ever active. He appeared more alive somehow to the necessities of the rapidly changing times. His hits were more palpable. He led, Golightly's had now fallen into the position of the toiling imitator. That alone was ominous. The older firm, too, with that rashness which besets uncertainty, had embarked on a side issue, a vast commercial speculation in a machine that was to revolutionise printing. Potiphar had prophesied a monopoly; the trade, as a whole, simply *must* adopt this miracle, but the miracle refused to work. Already the loss was more than they could comfortably sustain.

"We must shut it down," Dorian summed up, "and cut the loss."

Potiphar moved uneasily in his chair. "I still believe in the thing," he objected. "The tide will turn. If we throw up the Automatic-Reduplicator someone else will sail in and reap the profits. I know Hay was sick he didn't get wind of it first. He was ready, you know, to install it all through their place, if we'd let Rheingold and Stingo come into the concern."

"Pity we didn't."

"There you make a great mistake. Golightly's couldn't agree to any business connection with R. S. & H., even on a side track."

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Dorian changed the subject. It was unpleasant, for Potiphar had carried the Board against him on this point. Such defeats had been few, but they rankled all the more.

"No," Potiphar continued, "we must go on as we are. There's a stiff pull ahead, but Golightly's will turn up trumps yet. We'll never beat the others now, as I once hoped, but we'll hold our own. There's room, as it seems, for both, we've lots of fight in us yet."

Dorian agreed, a little sick at heart. The months of Potiphar's inactivity had not been altogether unmixed triumph for the henchman. In spite of himself he had been forced to recognise that he owed more than he had dreamed to Golightly's captaincy. Many a project — an idea — that he had fondly believed to be his own, he now traced indirectly to the old man. Dorian had moulded the thing, certainly, had given it finish and polish, but the primal impulse had come from the chief. Daily intercourse with that energetic mind, crude, perhaps, but vital, had kept Dorian up to the mark. The two men, so sharply contrasted, were complementary. Between them they evolved power. Dorian, single-handed, was conscious of a defect in himself. And now the older man's powers were shaken. He talked bravely of renewed activity, but Stepney saw that Potiphar would never be the same man again. Golightly had not been told how precarious was his hold on life. Amelia knew. She had told Dorian. When she had spoken, the two looked at each other in silence. Then for a moment they looked beyond, and looked away.

"Well," Potiphar continued, "one of these days we'll

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have new blood, I hope, in the old place." He spoke almost wistfully. Dorian understood.

"What news of Osric?" he asked, assuming a cheerful tone.

Golightly frowned. "Oh, he's enjoying himself all right. He takes up his head too much with nonsense. He's too dillytanty, for my notions."

"Time will cure that."

"Hope so. I sometimes wonder if he shouldn't have come straight into the business from school."

"I think not. He'll always be a better man of the world for having been up yonder."

"Well, when we get him back, we'll knock the nonsense out of him. I intend to make him work through every department. We'll put him into the *Healthies*, the *Flapper*, and the other little papers first."

"We mustn't disgust him, though."

Potiphar sat up. "My dear Stepney, that's just where *your* limitations come in. I know what you mean. Your training has put you outside some things. You lived it down well, I admit, but now and then your demn'd superiority looks out. That's where *I* come in. No, Osric has to learn that what was good enough for his father, at the beginning, is good enough for him."

Potiphar was growing dangerously excited. He had turned an ugly colour. Dorian evaded argument, and postponed his own opinions. Time enough for that. Golightly subsided, with sundry grunts, and gradually returned to amiability. He grew reminiscent, and talked of the earlier struggles and triumphs of the firm. Of Hiram he spoke with good-humoured contempt. What a mess he had made of it at the end, poor man!

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Then Potiphar changed his note.

"I wonder you never married, Dorian," he remarked *mal à propos*, as it seemed. But Potiphar was seldom really irrelevant.

Stepney laughed, without amusement in his mirth, and let Potiphar run on.

"No girl good enough, eh? Look around. Look around. I'm sure there are lots about, and some hanging on too long. That's a nice girl of Adderley's, now. Not too young to be silly, or old enough to be set. Do you ever see her?"

"Once in a blue moon, at the play and places."

"Beats me how she exists. But Kitty's all right, I'm sure. Saw her the other day by chance, in Bond Street. She's a good-looking little piece, bright too. Between you and me, Dorian, you might do worse. And she ought to be in the firm, you know, so to speak."

Potiphar laughed at his far-fetched joke. There were moments when he was uncomfortable about Kitty. Lately, during his illness, such moments had been rather insistent. Certain episodes of his career had risen up in judgment. The devil a monk would be! True, the business wasn't what it had been; but Kitty could still have had a sufficient little income, if she hadn't been a silly. And the business would be all right again. "Think it over, Dorian," he said. "You'd be all the better of a wife."

"I'm very well content as I am."

"Ay? Well, some men are built that way. I never was. Matrimony has its drawbacks, but when you come to my time of life, you may regret being single. I have my anxieties, but it's a great thing to have someone to

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come after you. And we'll make something of that boy yet."

"I don't doubt it. By the time he is ready to come down, he'll have outgrown the little absurdities you dislike. Don't let them bother you. Osric will be all right, no fear."

He spoke with a hopefulness he did not feel. More and more, of late years, Dorian had become convinced that the son of the house was born an alien to Golightly's.

CHAPTER V

OSRIC GOES THE COMPLETE UNICORN

OSRIC, to his extreme relief, was gated only for a week. His share of the damage done to Bones's oak and window was inconsiderable. He paid it cheerfully, and decided that the fun was worth the money. It was the first time he had taken a very active part in disorder. He had, however, tasted blood, as it were, and his ready wit in bringing up the battering-ram had gained him some esteem. He found himself in request among a certain set, a set that had for a few terms back given Craven the reputation of the rowdiest college in the University. That reputation is movable, it is held now by this society, now by that, no man knoweth how. The rioters were not exactly the so-called Intellectuals, but some of these were in their ranks, and in his mysterious way, Addleshaw, who pervaded every circle, seemed to exercise an upsetting force. He did it, too, without being caught himself. College meetings discussed him with perplexity. The Master and the Dean were convinced that he was the evil genius of the place, but other dons, whom he had contrived to charm by his brilliancy, spoke up for him. As it had never been possible to convict him of anything definite, nothing could be done. Certain dons regarded Welshpoole as the fount and origin of disturbance. He was certainly in continual hot water, and his hold on academic

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life was considered precarious. But as yet he had never gone too far. He might, possibly, weather all storms, as your practised malefactor will. Witness Addleshaw. As for Golightly, his was just that inexperienced, little calculating sort of character, upon which, when once it had lent itself to irregularity, the hand of Nemesis would fall with ironical suddenness. Hitherto he had kept fairly within the law, but after the attack on Bones, no row of the first magnitude was complete without him. He was developing into a really noisy man.

As soon as his sentence had expired, Osric gave a wine in celebration. It was like other wines, except that Addleshaw's profane wit lifted it some way above the common. At the end, they had a little bonfire, but Weale kicked it out, as soon as it was lighted. The Dean did not think it necessary to intervene, wherein he was quite justified; for the evening ended in slight anti-climax. A proposal to treat Bones to another serenade fell flat. The company melted away. A few stragglers hung about the lodge, rather drearily, talking cricket with Weale, a mighty authority on the game. It is curious how a rot may set in, even when an orgy seems likeliest. These things cannot be explained. The spirit of youth is a baffling quantity.

Not altogether cheerful, Osric went back to his rooms. They were rather in a mess. However, Wilkins would soon put that all right in the morning. He tumbled down upon his bed, without undressing, and thought, in some confusion, of the coming festivities. He almost wished the mater had not elected to come up. The Welsher, too, had voted his mother and sister a bore. There was to be a rather fascinating company at the

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theatre during Eights week: the Welsher had a particular friend in the chorus. Filial duty threatened to upset certain of his pleasant little schemes in that direction. Osric was in the same box now. It seemed that Kitty had got a walk-on in the company. That was curious. He didn't know she required to do anything. It was the least bit of a nuisance, for he had hoped by diplomacy to conquer the mater's curious indifference to Kit. But now, a chorus girl, more or less, would hardly do. He sympathised with the Welsher, and still sympathising fell asleep in his boots. Thus Wilkins found him in the morning, and smiled.

Eights week, with its whirling fun, came along in glorious weather. Addleshaw edited the *Blue Rattle*, the most daring of all the ephemeral papers that flash out and vanish in those irresponsible days. Osric contributed a sonnet, touched with gentle melancholy; for life was not altogether sweet. Although his father had elected not to come up, his dear mother was exacting; Lady Welshpoole too amiable, and that Hilda Thlangothlen frankly a bore. Kitty, somewhat inaccessible and seen only at stolen hours, when he pleaded indispensable lectures or visits to his tutor, was curiously forgiving of patent neglect. He managed to lunch her once at the Queen's, but it was a risk. Still, she didn't seem to mind; she quite understood. He sent constant gifts of flowers to her lodgings, and lived on the memory of her smiles. Poor Kitty! It appeared that dire necessity had driven her to accept the chance offer made by a friend in the theatrical world. She was quite frank about her finances. Her salary was a mere nothing. Osric, naturally kind-hearted, wondered whether he could be of

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use. Kitty shook her head, regretfully, and gave him a kiss. She was really touched, and the salute was entirely a sisterly impulse. But poor Osric saw visions and dreamed dreams.

The scene of this tender interlude was Miss Adderley's lodgings, whither, greatly daring, Osric had gone after seeing his mother home from the play. Amelia's keen eyes had cost him a horrid thrill.

"Oh!" Mrs. Golightly had exclaimed, "just look at that girl at the back of the stage. How awfully like——" She stopped.

"Like whom?" Osric asked, quaking.

"Do you remember Kitty Adderley?"

"Yes, perfectly."

"Well, isn't she like her?"

"A little, perhaps."

"I shouldn't wonder if she had gone on the stage. She was drifting that way. But it may be only fancy. No, I don't believe it is Kitty, after all."

The incident closed. Kitty did not appear again. Osric spent a penitential evening, lightened only by the thought of the stolen visit to come. He had to make it all too brief; for the hour was late.

Kitty, in all innocence of what her guest had risked for her sake, saw him to the door. It was the last night but one of a disappointing week. Grown reckless, he embraced her again. Once more with elder-sisterly goodwill Kitty returned the caress, almost on the threshold.

Osric turned away, uplifted, as one that dreamed. He trod on air; he loved and was loved in return! A

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few paces, and two plebeian figures glided up to his side. A portly gentleman in a velvet-sleeved gown stood before him and lifted his cap.

"Are you a member of this University, sir?"

"Y — Yes, sir."

"Your name and college, please. Thank you. Call on me at St. John's College to-morrow morning at nine o'clock."

The Proctor bowed again and turned away. Osric, tingling with anger and fear, got back to Craven, he knew not how. Unjust, unjust! And it was not an ordinary case. Coming home without cap and gown from the theatre, especially during Eights week, was usually winked at by the Proggins. That wasn't his offence. Osric knew what he would be charged with to-morrow. He had been seen coming out of professional lodgings — the Prog. knew every house in town perfectly — Good heavens! It meant being sent down. And poor Kitty, too, she'd be sent down as well. Horror! What a drivelling ass he had been. No explanation was possible. The mater? What about confessing, and getting her to say Kitty was a very old friend of the family, and he had seen her home by his mother's orders? No go. Wouldn't wash. Prog. knew she was an actress. Despair took hold of Osric. Well, he might as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb.

As he drew near the gates of Craven, a tumultuous roar came muffled from within; a clamour of many voices, the continual explosion of fireworks. Over the buildings rose a warm glow of light. The boat had gone up another place, making the fourth for the week, that afternoon. Unable to wait for a regularly arranged

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bump-supper next week, certain enthusiasts had begun to celebrate victory already. Osric kicked at the wicket. The junior porter opened to him and the roar surged out, redoubled, hitting Osric, as it were, in the face. The quadrangle, it seemed, was all on fire, a very inferno. Goblin lights and shadows played fantastic tricks on the ancient walls. In the centre a huge bonfire blazed. Athwart the flames demonic figures leaped and swirled, joined hands and danced in mad circles round the flames; squibs sputtered, Roman candles flung their soft plopping stars aloft, crackers quarrelled among the feet of the dancers. At one corner stood the Master and the Dean, capped, acting as good-humoured police. Things had gone too far to be stopped. Authority could only strive to keep the affair within bounds. As yet it was merely harmless noise, and the fire was fed with legitimate enough fuel: firewood and a hastily imported tar-barrel. This impromptu would probably prohibit the regular bump-supper in hall, with a genial interchange of hilarity between dons and undergraduates, but no matter. In a legalised affair, Mr. Seneschal would have joined hands, and suffered himself to be whirled once or twice round the fire with the revel rout. To-night he must stand aloof.

"Hullo, Orgies!" said Addleshaw, whirling past, arrayed as a ballet-girl. He stopped and seized Osric. "Come on."

The distracted boy gave a wild shout and joined the crowd. It was his last chance. What happened afterwards seemed like some dim phantasmagory of the underworld. He remembered a hurried visit with others to the Bounder's rooms, where the Bounder acted as

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cup-bearer. It was heady stuff, but it did Osric good. "Damn the Proggins!"

"Go it, Orgies!" shouted the chorus. With a roar they rushed downstairs again.

The fire was getting low. "Come on," Golightly cried, "this way." He leaped through the dying flames, the others after him, and rushed away towards the Senior Common-Room.

Chairs and a wonderful old table, sacred to many a learned symposium, were hurried towards the fire. Authority strove to save its treasures, but the forces of disorder were too strong. Another gang rushed a staircase; there was a sound of tearing, splintering wood, as steps were torn up and bannisters wrenched away. The fire soared again gloriously. Tins of paraffin, stolen from the scout-holes of men who still, in those days of electricity, clung to the old reading-lamp, sent the flames aloft gorgeously. And above all the shouting, Osric's voice rose shrill, urging to new mischief. A glorious night! A mad night!

"Go to your rooms, Golightly; go to your rooms."

The Master stood beside him, pale and agitated. Osric laughed in his face, screeched an impertinence, knocked off his cap, and darted away. But only to run into Weale. The porter's strong arms closed about him. Helpless, Osric struggled and blasphemed. Then he collapsed, and in a passion of weak tears, went sullenly up to his rooms.

Next morning the awakening voice of Wilkins added to its unvarying formula—"It is *seven* o'clock, sir; do you breakfast *in*, sir?"—the intimation—"The Master wishes to see you at eleven o'clock, sir."

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He was to have breakfasted with his mother, but he sent along a note saying he had a bad headache.

It was no good going to see the Proctor. The Master would have his report by this time to aggravate his case. He sported his oak and brooded till eleven. He feared that every footstep on the stair might be his mother's. She would be sure to come.

At eleven he put on his gown — was it for the last time? — and went over to the Master's lodgings. He met Welshpoole coming out.

"I'm sent down for a year," said that worthy. A faint gleam of hope arose for Osric, but Mr. Seneschal froze him where he stood.

"I shall not waste words, Golightly, to characterise your conduct. You are sent down, *sine spe reditus*."

"By the way," he said, as Osric turned to go; "it is scarcely worth mentioning, but I understand you should have called on the Proctor this morning and did not. It was a small matter, merely that you were without cap and gown. I shall explain your non-appearance. It is now, unfortunately, immaterial. You will leave Oxford to-night."

The Master turned away. Such duties gave him unutterable pain. Lecturing or good advice at such a moment he felt to be the most useless cant. He had to be at once judge and summary executioner. Despatch was the only mercy. He did not know how terribly ironical had been his casual remark about the Proctor's trifling charge.

Stunned by the injustice of life, Osric left the room. It was the first time he had come face to face with a world of realities.

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He had better clear off to Town at once. He could not face his mother. The men would want to give him and the others a beautiful funeral to the station; there would be a hearse and no end of cabs. He didn't want that either. The murder would be out soon, and sympathisers would come crowding in. Yes, he must clear off quietly. He needn't take anything. The governor wouldn't shut the door of Queen's Gate upon him, though there would be the devil to pay otherwise. He went out, speaking to no man.

At the station he recalled Dorian's words: "Take all the fun you can, in reason; but don't go the complete unicorn."

How sudden, how complete it had been!

And all, as it turned out, for nothing!

CHAPTER VI

THE TREND OF FORCES

IT was Potiphar who, when his first anger subsided, took a practical view of the affair. He had raged awhile, to his hurt, and Amelia watched her lord with frightened eyes, always with that strange vision of a Possibility lurking in the background. It was less vivid, however, just now because of sorrow for her son. Osric could not, or would not, explain the disaster. Amelia, hurrying back to town, her maternal feathers sadly ruffled, plied the boy with questions, well-meaning, but ill-informed and merely irritating. The house at Queen's Gate was a scene of horrid domestic stress. Then out of the welter Potiphar arose.

After all, to be sent down from the University didn't ruin a boy's career. It had happened to men who rose to high public esteem. The place, at the best, was only ornamental, and doubtfully ornamental at that. Here was Osric free, unexpectedly, for his father's benign purposes, long before that had seemed possible. It was a great saving of time. The less said the better. Potiphar put away wrath, and like a calm judge, pronounced sentence:

"You'll just come into the business at once, Osric."

The boy shrugged his shoulders. He was still too much upset to resist. He hardly realised things, even yet. It had all passed in a flash; pleasure, terror, defiance,

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exaltation — what the deuce had the Bounder given him? — madness, disaster. This flaring out of an unstable, undisciplined nature left its victim bewildered, stunned. "All right," he said, sullenly answering his father.

But Amelia intervened, pleading for an interval, until things should blow over. In the end, Osric was sent for a few months to Germany. Potiphar saw practical sense in that, when Amelia, secretly prompted by Dorian, urged the claims of the language. So, for a little, the evil day was put off.

In the interval, many forces, of upbuilding and down-pulling, were at work. Potiphar, encouraged at the prospect of Osric's advent, and glad in his heart of hearts that the Place of Fossils could do the boy no further damage, progressed at a great pace towards health. His doctor marvelled, and congratulating his patient and himself, prescribed a continuance of careful living. But the rebound to apparent health exhilarated Golightly, and with exhilaration came rashness. Insidiously, the temptation of fat paths wrought upon Potiphar, and gradually he yielded to the spell of the butler and the baker. Business worries had not decreased, but he was fit; by gad! fit as a fiddle, to tackle them, and a man must have something to keep him going. Amelia at home, and Stepney during business hours, salved their consciences with warnings they knew very well to be half-hearted — "useless" was their pained adjective. The Possibility had begun to loom large again. But such things were not to be thought of. Away! unprofitable ghosts!

But that was all very remote. These cobwebs, Dorian reflected, were perhaps the Nemesis of a life, save in one

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particular, monastic. A little distraction might not be amiss, and it could not savour of disloyalty, where no ties of right were dreamed of or possible. Once or twice Stepney had recalled Potiphar's jocose and fatherly advice. It came from a curious quarter certainly — but of that no more. Dorian took up a note he must answer, and read it again, smiling.

The note recalled a promise of some standing, on his part; it explained delay in claiming the promise on the part of the writer. But now the way was clear. Time and place were suggested. Would he come?

Well, there was no reason why he should not. No doubt there was some further axe to grind at the back of the invitation. But one could never escape these things. No one was purely disinterested. And who was he to seek the purely disinterested? The modern Diogenes, lighting his lantern at noonday and searching London, would be long ere he found the Altruist. He would stumble sooner on the truly honest man.

Pastime with good company, said Stepney, changing the subject of his thoughts, and therewith he signed and sealed his courteous acceptance of Miss Adderley's invitation.

That young lady, whose theatrical engagement had ended in smoke, had in these days been driven to take stock once more. The sands were all but run out. She had played her game gallantly, but the end she had prearranged remained obstinately in the future — a future she had hardly dared consider. She had not been quite clever, it seemed. A really clever girl would have compelled Solomon. But he was so complex, and fettered it seemed by some, to her, invisible and uncalculated

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bonds. He had been definite, to be sure, and therein lay a solution of every difficulty, but he went the wrong way about it. Oh, she had made herself too cheap! Well, why cry over spilt milk? Action was the cry. In many ways that other was nicer than Solomon, although he could not give so much. Still, he was not negligible. Incidentally, she wondered why little boy Osric hadn't been to see her. Long vacation was far through. He hadn't even written. Well, mankind was curious; one foot on sea and one on shore, to one thing constant never. But a dear, kind-hearted boy. She would not lose sight of him. Yet, she hesitated to write. He was a man now, of course, and his letters concerned himself only. Still, Amelia was no longer her friend. Amelia knew her handwriting and might ask questions, as mothers will. For the present, Kitty had more important business. As she thought it over, she realised more than ever that she had not been quite clever. She had surrounded herself with an interesting crowd, but hardly one of her young men, clever as they were, had any position, solid position. Except Solomon, she had had no man of real substance on her string. But for long he had amply filled the bill. She had taken Solomon too much for granted. And Solomon had come grievously short. Well, she must be wiser now. It was the eleventh hour, but there was still a chance. Her private life had grown more restricted lately; but she could still flaunt it a little in public, as the woman of means. With that thought she wrote to Stepney, asking him to the long-delayed lunch.

Dorian enjoyed the encounter, and at the end proposed the inevitable return of hospitality. One little thing he

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did not altogether enjoy. At a table not far off sat Lady Welshpoole with a party. However, one couldn't go abroad in a hat of darkness. Still, women always gave each other news. As it happened, Lady Welshpoole did not give her news to a woman. That afternoon she had to consult Mr. Golightly about one of her inevitable investments, and casually she gossiped. Potiphar smiled. This was all very good.

"I believe, Amelia," he said that night, "our friend Dorian is looking about him at last. Never too late to mend."

"What do you mean, Pharie?"

"He's always been a backward boy with the girls, but lately I gave him some good advice, and I believe it's bearing fruit. Mrs. Welshpoole" — this was an odious joke of Potiphar's very distasteful to Amelia — "Mrs. Welshpoole tells me she saw him lunching a little friend of ours, and they seemed to be getting on very well."

"Indeed! but surely there's nothing in a man's giving a girl lunch? Who was the woman?"

"Kitty Adderley."

"Oh!"

"You don't seem interested, Amelia?"

"Why should I be interested? No doubt it was chance. Perhaps Kitty cadged the lunch."

"Easy, Amelia, easy, old girl. I never could understand why you dropped Kitty."

"It was her own fault. I invited her till I was tired. She seemed to prefer her own very *peculiar* set, including Mr. Rheingold, and I ceased to trouble about her. It's an old story. As for Dorian and your amiable fancies, absurd!"

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Potiphar, believing that he had somehow blundered, made haste to change the subject. But he hugged his fancy. "We'll see, we'll see," he said.

"Besides," said Amelia, making a last shot, "Dorian's a hopeless bachelor. I gave up giving him good advice — of your kind — long ago."

Potiphar, from behind the *Financial Times*, gave no answer, except an annoying chuckle. He had been imprudent again at dinner-time, and life, for the moment, seemed a goodly thing. Amelia, a little ruffled, went to her writing-table, and scribbled diligently.

"I shall go to bed, Pharie," she said at the end of an hour. "I'm very tired. Good night."

"Good night, my dear."

Potiphar made no haste to obey his doctor's orders, still in force, about early hours. He and Amelia were drifting far apart. In stolid, half-despairing acquiescence he watched, helpless, the growth of an estrangement he could not altogether understand. Well, there were other solaces. Confound the doctors! Now that Amelia had gone and they would not meet till morning there was no chance of rebuke — he might just as well — only a little one.

And with a will Potiphar disobeyed his physician.

Begone, dull care!

Rosy dreams circled about Potiphar's head. Very soon now the boy would come home. The father would have a new interest in life, teaching the son his business.

CHAPTER VII

THE APPRENTICE

PRIDE and hope reigned in Golightly's heart the first morning he took his son down to the House to install him as a potential official. As yet, Osric should have no definite position; he should move in quiet and orderly progression, through all departments, to observe, to note, to learn. "Insight," that was the blessed word of commerce. Osric was to "obtain insight," so that in process of time he should emerge, at the top, qualified, a pastmaster of the whole art and mystery of Golightlyism. Cynics called it "bamming the public." Let them. They were snarling, libellous outsiders, who knew nothing of affairs. Potiphar always gave value for money. Any man might be proud to have built up such a concern. True, it had fallen on difficult days, but a battle is never lost until it is won. New blood, a new impetus, the excitement of playing for a big stake, all these considerations gave Potiphar a new lease of life. One day he could take his ease. He could have wished that the boy had shown more enthusiasm, that he had given some promise of aptitude, but he was young, all untried; once he tasted the zest of the game, he would shape all right. After all, he was a Golightly, *the* Golightly to be. He could hardly betray his blood.

Without gratification, Amelia watched the departure of father and son. To her it was the end of many fond

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fancies. She was sure the dear boy hated it. But he had said little. In fact, since that unfortunate affair, he had been rather chastened. Amelia feared lest Osric's spirit had been broken. Sadly she turned away from the window. Lately she had been rather lonely. Strange misgivings had tormented her, premonitions of evil, unaccountable but insistent. She had not let Potiphar's absurd story about Dorian distress her, but for some time her stolen communings with her twin soul, those oases in the desert, had been rarer. Dorian had been terribly occupied. That was true. Amelia had Potiphar's word for it that the House was passing through a crisis. She heard much spasmodic cursing of Rheingold, Stingo, Hay, and all their works. But the Golightlys would come out on top yet. So Potiphar swore, and hugged the future.

Osric found himself embarked, perhaps adrift, on strange seas. At first whole days spent amid the bustle, the rush, the multitude of swirling activities bewildered him. Hurrying figures in corridors looked at him curiously; he was introduced to minor officials. The great heads of departments he already knew. Then he settled down in a quieter backwater, and began to look round for "insight." Nothing as yet interested him very much. He sat with Mr. Tipping, a pale, spectacled young man, of uncertain accent, and saw how the *Healthies* were launched on their salubrious mission to mankind. There was a great deal to be done, it seemed, although Mr. Tipping assured him that the *'Ealthies* practically ran themselves.

"Leave them alone, then, and let's watch," Osric suggested.

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Mr. Tipping laughed sycophantically.

"Ow, you mustn't take it quite literal, Mr. Hosric. It's only my little joke. I mean, the business is *routeen*, principally. Stuff comes in, stuff goes out, to time. Time's the great thing. Every paige through to the minnit, that's the rule. Otherwise there's extra expense."

Then, having a moment of leisure, Mr. Tipping took up three graduated rulers and showed Osric how to measure an illustration to ascertain the size to which it should be reduced by the process-engraver. Mr. Tipping called this ceremony "putting the rule over 'em."

This ingenious dodge of practical mathematics amused Osric. He tried his hand at it, glad of the diversion. His result, however, was hopelessly out. Mr. Tipping said it was fatal to go wrong in this. It upset the page, and meant, if the error went through, a new block and the waste of money, a most serious thing. Tipping added, however, that the method was easily learnt, a mere detail.

Osric yawned, and made some notes. His father had charged him to write up a log-book every day with his observations on things seen. It was the only way to learn. He longed for lunch-time. The room was close, the deep, monotonous brool of machinery through the building made one sleepy. It was like being on board a steamer, without the fresh air.

On another day, when Osric had made some progress in technicalities, the ingenious Tipping approached the vital question of subject-matter. He handed Osric two bulky bundles of typescript.

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"'Ere's two stories, '*Ealthies*, Mr. Hosric. Perhaps you'd like to run your eye through them, and tell me which you think most sootable. One's 'opeless, the man's gone all dicky this time. Suppose you try to spot the winner."

All morning Osric toiled through the violet-coloured, faulty, irritating type. He had not finished by lunch-time. The afternoon was far spent before he was ready to give Tipping his verdict. Both efforts, he thought, seemed pretty average drivel. He had never seen such thronging adventures, such a compendium of the violent and the improbable. At a loss for a criterion, he thought it safe to give the palm to the story in which most people were killed.

Mr. Tipping congratulated him. He had spotted the winner. Tipping ventured to say that plainly Mr. Hosric was his father's son. He repeated this later, under examination, to the chief. Potiphar was reassured. He had not been quite satisfied with his first survey of the log-book. It was desultory and incomplete. However, if the boy had the root of the matter in him, all was well.

This incident hastened Osric's removal to another sphere. He took his day's work with a listless apathy. To his mother's anxious inquiries as to "how he liked it," he answered, "Oh, all right," and changed the subject. If his days were not exciting, he had some compensation in the evenings. The Welsher, still banished from Craven, was in town. The two found plenty to interest them in the West End. Potiphar allowed Osric a guinea a week salary, just to encourage him; Amelia contributed secret supplements.

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Welshpoole had a pleasant way of dropping in at the office about lunch-time. During the Tipping régime this did not matter; he sat on a desk until Osric was ready and made refreshing epigrams on the *Healthies*. Tipping, a convinced Radical-Socialist, looked on a lord with disdain, and was not wounded by aristocratic wit, which he accounted vacuity. But when Osric was removed to the *Flapper*, and sat for a season with Miss Swillet, he gave orders to the commissionaire to keep Welshpoole in the waiting-room, alleging that the pater had forbidden visitors to penetrate to the secret places of industry. Welshpoole wondered, doubted, smelt a rat, sent his love to Tipping, with whom he supposed Osric still studied, but failed to pierce the mystery. Osric seemed more cheerful, somehow, but the reason remained hidden.

He would have come no nearer a solution had he seen the prim and faded charms of the Swillet. In her society Osric had achieved unutterable boredom. He read fiction and delectable poetry quite other than that which was hourly passing into the pages of the *Flapper*. Miss Swillet, well knowing that what young Mr. Golightly might or might not learn in her department could in no wise matter to the fortunes of a young ladies' journal edited by herself, left him to his own devices and went on unhindered with her work.

But withal, the *Flapper* had incidentally brought Osric a ray of sunshine. In a contributor, who called one day on Miss Swillet, he recognised the chance acquaintance of a fleeting but memorable hour. Lynette looked, looked again and smiled recognition. Osric rose from his corner and held out his hand.

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"Do sit down," he said, "Miss Swillet will be back in a moment."

Lynette looked at him with an eager hope in her eyes.

"Are you," she cried impulsively, "are *you* editing the *Flapper* now?" She foresaw possibilities.

"Oh no!" — Osric was not exactly flattered — "I'm just here for a bit, looking round."

Miss Swillet delayed her coming. The two young people made remarkably good use of their time. Lynette noticed that he did not ask after Kitty. The memory of that young woman was full of painful associations. One day he meant to resume that broken thread, but not yet, not yet awhile.

From that day dated the cheerfulness Welshpoole could not understand. He noted also that he was seeing less and less of Osric. That young man was somehow preoccupied. He had something up his sleeve. Well, most men had that. Welshpoole believed that he would hear, one day, and went about his own affairs, which were many and diverting. It was not bad fun being sent down.

Osric, however, had to buy his experience. His increased liveliness pleased Potiphar, who put it down to real interest in the business. Things were shaping all right. He had known they would. On a day, Osric would soon be promoted to the *Fireside*, and thence to the higher walks, where he would mingle with the able young men, Dorian's needy but pliable scholars, who were more his equals. That would be pleasant for the boy. But on a day, Miss Swillet, with unusual carelessness, fell ill. Potiphar decreed that Osric, now somewhat advanced, should bring out that week's *Flapper*

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by himself, as an exercise. Stepney said it was rather too soon. "Nonsense," said Potiphar. "The boy's all right."

Osrice, who held the *Flapper* in contempt, took the duty lightly. He had merely to follow precedent, except in one particular, where he saw a chance. His father's maxim, "Have no friends in business," did not distress him.

Late in the afternoon, when the *Flapper* was nearly complete, he had a visit from the foreman printer: that autocrat, who watches, like Cerberus, the vagaries of editors.

"You're leaving out the Fashions and all the Competitions this week, Mr. Osrice?"

"Oh, yes. There's no room."

"But Miss Holiday's story's a good two pages over the usual length."

"It's too good to cut."

"But the rule, Mr. Osrice, the rule is three pages, no more. And you know, sir, we live by the Competitions and the Fashions."

"Bally rot!" said Osrice, "between you and me, Macgregor."

"Maybe, Mr. Osrice, but they sell the paper. The story hardly counts nowadays. The subscribers 'll be furious, if there's no Competitions and Competition results."

"Well, I've made up the pages now."

"It's not too late, Mr. Osrice. I can easily alter for you, without its showing in the accounts. In fact, I held up the pages a bit, when I saw what you were doing. I fear there'll be music if you don't cut that story down."

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Then Osric, who had learned no proper restraint towards inferiors — Macgregor, that man of men, his inferior! — played the fool.

“Are you editing this paper or am I, Macgregor?”

“Weel, weel,” said the autocrat, relapsing into his vernacular. “Tak’ yer ain road, sir. If ye dinna ken wha’s yer friend, naeboddy’ll learn ye. But you’ll either mak’ room for that other stuff or I’ll go straucht to Mr. Stepney.”

Osric sat glooming. ‘A mere printer man to speak like this to him! Of course, Dorian wouldn’t listen to him.

“I’ll gie ye ten minutes,” said Macgregor, gathering up his slip proofs. “If by that time ye don’t ’phone up to me that ye’ll cut that story down, I’ll take other advice.”

“Get out of this,” Osric screamed. “Printer’s devil!”

Macgregor, too much the man of the world to be really offended and well able to make allowance for inexperience, turned with urbane dignity:

“No man ever spoke to me like that in this house before, Mr. Osric. I go, because my time’s precious, not because you order me out. Think better of it, sir, and tak’ my advice, never call names at one o’ the auldest and grandest o’ crafts. The printer can haud up his head wi’ onybody, gentle or simple.”

He bowed and went out, six foot of fine manhood.

Osric sulked for nine minutes by his watch. For the first time he had met a real master. If Macgregor could afford to speak like that to him, the son of the House, he must be in a pretty firm position. Very likely Dorian would listen to him, and there would be the devil to pay.

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Osric could never be resolute, even in a case like this.

At the tenth minute, he took down the receiver, and asked the office exchange for the composing-room.

"I say, Macgregor, that you, Macgregor? All right. Send me the slip proofs of the story again, and I'll cut them down. And I say, Macgregor, sorry, you know, about that remark. I'm sure your advice is right. Thank you very much."

Sadly he mutilated Lynette's story. And he had hoped to put a little extra her way. What an iron place it was! And what an iron man Macgregor! Well, he must make it up to Lynette in some other way. How disappointed she would be!

He had hardly sent up the hacked proofs when Dorian came in.

"Well, old boy, how goes it? Strong?"

"Oh, fairly."

"Going to give us a good paper? Let me see, have you your duplicate make-up of the *Flapplet* handy? Oh, here it is." Dorian took up the pamphlet of blank pages and read Osric's scribbled arrangements. "Hullo! what's this, *five* pages of story and no Fashions, and where are your Competitions? My eye, boy, what are you up to?"

"Oh, that was a muddle, it's all right now. I didn't write in my final scheme."

"Lucky you altered it. Your father would have had something to say. It's a wonder you hadn't old Macgregor down, foaming at the mouth, about it. You would, if you hadn't changed that make-up. Come along to my room for tea!"

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As he went, Osric reflected on the power of Macgregor. By Jove! what a funny world!

Thus, by easy stages, the panorama of Golightly's was revealed to Osric. He passed from department to department, without enthusiasm and often sick at heart with what he saw. But he had found a secret interest in life, and that held him from actual rebellion. His mother wondered at his apparent docility, but she, like Welshpoole, found no key to the mystery. The boy seemed to be enjoying life, in the hours when he was not claimed by the prison-house.

At the prison-house, truly, all was not well; for daily the pressure was growing fiercer. More and more a rigid, almost a cheeseparing economy, was imposed upon the staff. Expenses had to be cut down at every corner. Dissatisfaction began to creep in, unrest reared its Hydra-head. Potiphar and Dorian, and with them the purely financial officials, noted with dismay a steady set-back in the firm's prosperity. The elder Golightly would not believe that the concern was threatened with permanent decline, but the present outlook was ominous, and Potiphar knew that at the next annual meeting, he would require all his diplomacy to reassure his shareholders. For Golightly's, it seemed, would be compelled to pass its dividend.

CHAPTER VIII

CONVERGENCE

"IT seems," said Rheingold, in council with the Triumvirate, "that we're justified of our existence at last." Before him lay a torn slip of an Exchange telegraphic message.

"Yes," said Stingo. "Golightly's is feeling a draught."

Punchie rose and went over to the tape instrument deliberately clicking out its story of the moment.

"Hullo, here's some more of the meeting. By Jove, there's been a regular row! Golightly's had a bad heckling. They're wanting to put in extra directors. Here's one silly ass of a shareholder calling on the old man to resign. That's absurd, of course, but it'll give his pride a horrid knock. And here's another saying nasty things about the *Beacon* and Stepney."

The others came over to the tape and watched while the conclusion of the story was spelt out letter by letter. As usual, the storm had subsided in the end, and it appeared that the report was adopted, but not by any means unanimously.

"Proxies," said Rheingold.

"No doubt," said Stingo. "Well, this is a decided shake for G."

"Naturally," said Hay, "*we* shall not gloat. The *Torch* will give a most temperate, even obscurantist, account of the proceedings."

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"This," said Rheingold, tapping the tape, "is the writing on the wall."

"I happen to know," said Stingo, "that Golightly's commitments are heavier than is generally supposed. Outside ventures have hastened this crisis. I believe he would listen to overtures."

Rheingold shook his head. "Too soon," he said. "He's a proud, pig-headed man."

"With us," said Hay, "the concern has still a future. It would be well to get hold of it before things go farther. Another year or so of our active hostility, and it's not worth looking at. And everybody over yonder isn't pig-headed. Other people will save themselves, if Golightly won't."

"Yes, but how are *they* to be got at?" Stingo asked. "I once thought *I* saw a way, but no."

"Leave that to me," said Rheingold cryptically. "I think I may be able to pour poison, indirectly, into certain ears."

For some time past Solomon, who enjoyed many sources of information, not alone on matters of business, had been amused to watch afar off certain details in the personal history of two people. He forgot nothing that he might one day turn to account. Now, it seemed, fortune had put an instrument into his hand. The growing intimacy of the two people in question had not, it seemed, as he had at first suspected, been as yet to the material advantage of one of them. She was just at the last gasp, financially. Perhaps he would not be unwelcome now. Hitherto, since his mistake, he had held aloof. But there was really no reason why he should not return. Their parting, in-

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deed, had left the way open. She had deprecated heroics.

Warily, therefore, Solomon went to work. And Fate, through diverse instruments, played into his hands.

Out of the flux of London, from lives sundered and lives fortuitously linked, lives pursuing their individual pleasure, careful about their own profit, lives here antagonistic, there knit by passion, lives that to the casual observer had little community of interest, and were yet all directly or unconsciously contributory to one catastrophe, came Solomon's opportunity. In several cases he did not know with what tools he wrought.

These were strange and critical days for Kitty Adderley, but anxiety was not untouched with hope. Her second experiment, it seemed, was bearing good fruit. Acquaintance had ripened into interest, interest into friendship, perhaps to something warmer. A much-harassed man, it appeared, had found a pleasing distraction in an intimacy that need not, if need were, be limited by the Platonic. In the light of that revelation the purely Platonic had paled somewhat. Perhaps, after all, life held better things. Time would show.

Into Kitty's life, also, a side wind had once more drifted that water-fly, young Osric. Not that he thought of her any more. He was content now with the elder-sisterly way. But she gave him opportunities, and these he was quick to seize. Her love for the House of Golightly was of the mixed order that did not preclude cynical enjoyment of a situation that promised advan-

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tage to a little friend of hers, at the expense of — the House of Golightly. Little boy Osric might do worse, far worse. And he and Lynette were very amusing to watch. It was curious to see how he was following in his father's footsteps. Kitty knew that Amelia had been an official provider of Romance to the great House, before she herself became Romance personified for the chief. And now a humble little provider of Romance had become Romance personified for the second generation. It would not be exactly jam — oh, Kitty of the careless tongue! — for Mrs. Amelia, but Mrs. Amelia need not be considered overmuch.

Little boy Osric, too, had his uses. It had cost Kitty something to make use of him, but necessity is a stern taskmaster, and the boy had always been more than half-way ready. There was Solomon, of course, who could have done far more; but with Solomon, in that particular, she would have no truck — oh, Kitty — she had been unable to forget his initial blunder. And his terms were impossible. All the same, she had a mission to perform for Rheingold, not for his sake, but because he had seen that his scheme held possible advantage for one, whose interests she was willing to make her own. Solomon had gone about it cunningly.

"Golightly's," he had remarked incidentally, "is not what it was."

"Fortunately," said Kitty, "I am not interested in Golightly's." Then she belied her lack of interest by a question: "It's not going to burst, is it?"

"I do not say burst" — Solomon smiled — "at least not immediately. But it is in need of support it can no longer, I fear, supply from within. It has to struggle

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with adverse forces. Remove these, turn them into allies, and it might still flourish."

"I see," said Kitty. "But are these forces not permanently hostile?"

"Possibly not. If the old man saw an inch beyond his self-sufficiency, all might yet be well. But he will never give in. Absorption in any shape or form would kill him."

"Has it been hinted to him?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"To anyone else?"

"No. Do you think any others would be more amenable?"

"How should I know? As I said, Golightly's does not interest me. But for Mr. Golightly's low cunning, I might have been a rich woman to-day."

"Yes, but you would have been feeling a little difference in the present state of things."

"To be sure; but I'd still have been better off. There are other things besides Ordinary Shares."

"Yes, but you would have been quaking at the thought of liquidation."

"Then no doubt Mr. Golightly was really my benefactor."

"As you please," Solomon laughed. "At any rate, he'll never be his own. He's doomed sooner or later, unless someone sees where salvation lies and takes the upper hand."

"I'm sure," Kitty summed up, "I don't know why we're taking so much trouble to discuss people for whom I don't care two straws."

"Nor I."

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"Then let's talk about something else. This is beastly dull. You ought to be amusing when you come to see me. You used to be."

"Ah, then," Solomon murmured, "I was not a disappointed man."

But Kitty took him up sharply.

"Look here, Mr. Rheingold, that's all tommy-rot. Certain things are *finished*. Please don't allude to them again. Otherwise we can't be friends, I mean, we can't meet as if nothing had happened. I like to see you now and then, and it's simpler not to have made a melodramatic parting. These things lead to such awkwardness. And people who know how to behave can always meet, superficially and pleasantly, in society, whatever may lie behind them. But they must put it behind them absolutely. I only want pleasantness on my way through life. I never look back. Once a thing is finished it's finished. I never allow it to be a barrier to other paths in the future. All the same, I never *turn* back. You understand?"

"Perfectly," said Solomon. "You deserve to succeed. Most practical of women!"

He went away, and Kitty pondered long upon his words. How much did Solomon know? That was immaterial. The vital thing was evidently that Rheingold and Co. were not unwilling to absorb—gobble up, was Kitty's phrase—the adversary. As far as Golightly himself was concerned, he might go to the wall. That would be poetical justice, not unwelcome to the daughter of Hiram, but there were others. The more she considered it, the more she saw in it. Had Solomon talked at random, or was he merely using her? If he was

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using her, she ought to say "What price? Where do I come in?" But that would lead to endless complications. The point was, she had a cue. It might serve her interest very well to use it, at the right time.

She was pretty desperate now, and matters were not moving just as rapidly as they might. *He* had been terribly absorbed in business lately, there had been no invitation for some time. An invitation on her own part was not very easy. The places that had known Kitty, the apparently "rolling"—again the phrase is hers—knew her very seldom nowadays, except as the guest of someone else. She still kept up to some extent the *va et vient* of her impecunious circle of talent, but it was long since she had given a real feast, and the mere parasites of that mob had soon fallen away. The faithful few, including Lynette, were easily entertained. But it could not be concealed that altogether Kitty was quieter. Whether she was hard up or had merely turned thrifty in her old age, as Addleshaw said, nobody knew.

Now, however, as the person most concerned was hanging fire and time precious, an entertainment of the better sort was indicated. Kitty always talked best when she had anything important to say, amid the cheerful stimulus of a smart restaurant, not too smart, but just right and on the quiet side, if anything, where the food and wine were persuasive. And perhaps she could kill two birds at once.

But ways and means were a serious question. It meant a serious shrinkage of the sorry remnant, perhaps for nothing. Hitherto she had never sought aid from anybody. Then came an idea, insidious, tempting.

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Why not? It might be to the boy's own advantage in the end. The sideways humour of the thing appealed to Kitty. She had asked Osric to come along on Sunday afternoon. Lynette would be the only other guest. It would be easy to arrange that Lynette should come a little late. A very few minutes alone with Osric would be sufficient.

And so it was. In one eventual detail the manoeuvre was to be more perversely humorous than Kitty dreamed. She had no false shame. Straight to the point she came at once.

"Boy," she said, with a bewitching little gesture of despair, "I'm going to ask a favour."

"Yours before it's asked, Kitty, if it's in my power."

"As it happens, I'm desperately hard up."

"My dear Kitty, why didn't you tell me before?"

"Fortunately there was no need. It's only a short loan; a loan, remember."

"Would a fiver be any use?"

"More than ample."

"Will to-morrow do? I haven't it on me just now, but you could have it to-morrow afternoon."

"Oh, there's no such desperate hurry."

"All right, Kit, with all my heart." Then Lynette came in, and they had a joyous little tea-party. Afterwards they went to a concert, and supped modestly in Soho. Home in a taxi; Kitty set down at her door first, and then the long drive—interlude most secret, sweet, and precious—to Lynette's virgin abode in the wilderness. Such things made amends for the small charm of working days. It is true to-night there was a little background of annoyance; for Kitty's request,

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granted with easy lips, had come, like all such requests, just at an awkward moment. The pater had been tapped recently, over and above salary, and had applied the closure for a definite period. There was, however, always the dear mater. Rightly handled, the mater never failed. The mater, rightly handled once more, did not fail. All unwitting, she supplied the sinews of war against herself. It meant a little sacrifice, for nowadays Potiphar was inclined to be careful, where he had previously been easily lavish, and Amelia had to observe times and seasons once unknown. The time had been when she never saw the bottom of her purse. Not so now, but for the boy's sake, she yielded gladly. Once she had suggested to Potiphar that Osric might be more generously rewarded for his official duties.

"He's not worth it—yet," said the Master of Men. "All in good time."

His manner was forbidding. Amelia froze and said no more. Pharie was ageing terribly. And avarice, she knew, was the sin of age. He was always grumbling, too, that times were bad. She tried, subtly, to draw Stepney on this point. Dorian shrugged his shoulders.

"Severe competition," he said, "that's all." Plainly he did not want to talk about the matter. Once more Amelia retreated, foiled. She would like to know the truth. There had been that stormy General Meeting, but her husband had made light of it. Half-heartedly, she suspected. But a woman was always kept outside these questions. She sighed and wondered. Horrible, if things should go quite wrong, after all these years of prosperity. Impossible! Golightly's was an impregnable rock.

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Dorian had disliked Amelia's indirect inquiry more than she had realised; for in these days it was always uppermost in his mind. There was no denying the downhill movement. But every concern had its setback, some time. A point, the lowest, would be touched at last, and then things would mend. He wished he could believe it. He was in a curious state of mind. Could it be the onset of Forty, age most treacherous to man? Hitherto he had gone calmly. Amelia had supplied all the emotion he needed; but now he was assailed by something indefinite and irresponsible. He had tried to hold it aloof, but it clamoured. It was bound up with one personality. The idea of that personality he could, not shake off. It was not Love. Absurd! But, whatever it was, it obsessed him, tormented him. He tried to shut the door upon it. The thing returned through the window. He absented himself from felicity—was it felicity?—awhile; the abstention came near torment. How all this had come about he did not know, but there it was, something that something other than himself, it seemed, reached after. But for him there would be only one woman, for ever unattainable, and therefore the more perfectly ideal and exalting. Why this disturbing thought of the cheaply attainable? It was a descent, deplorable, not to be paltered with. Up, and play the man! Therewith Mr. Dorian Stepney played the man, after the manner of men in like case. But on his resolve to see no more of this disturbing element, came an invitation, following a period of silence. It would be churlish to refuse; and he needed some relaxation. An evening of pastime with good company would send him back to his work refreshed.

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He needed all the refreshment he could find in these days.

Again he dressed fastidiously, not knowing why. It could matter to nobody. He was growing old and careworn. Lucky to have a pretty, youngish woman who cared to waste an evening on him. But, of course, it wasn't for himself. What did she want now? Well, if it was for herself this time, she might perhaps have it, in reason. The one favour she asked had turned out very well, as it happened. That little Miss Holiday was quite an acquisition. It was all very absurd. He was committed to nothing. He need not be in any hurry to return this entertainment. Once he had done so, he could, if policy directed, refuse her possible next, and so draw away gently. Then things would languish to an end. He was quite indifferent. In this frame he drove forth and awaited his hostess.

Bird-like and daintily gowned, Kitty stepped out of the taxicab and came through the swing-doors into the hall of that discreetly retired, yet irreproachable, restaurant, where she had first seen Dorian with Amelia.

Smiling, she gave him two fingers. In return he bought a few roses for her at the flower-stall in the vestibule. She pinned them into her breast, graciously, and chattered him amiably upstairs to their corner. A head-waiter, pink of gentlemanly deference, rejoiced to see Miss Adderley once more beneath that roof. His hovering assiduity assured the success of the meal, as a meal. The rest was Kitty's. Care, the ever-present thought of Golightly's fled before the persuasion of food, wine, and laughter. Menacing Forty retreated to the

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deserved limbo of such dull ghosts. It was a rejuvenescent Dorian that replied to Kitty's sallies.

Gradually, in the meditative aroma of cigarette smoke and sedative coffee, she grew more serious. Was she fencing for an opening? Ah, the cloven hoof at last! He knew it must show. However, it was the hour of good-humour, and, after all, human nature is ever so. Nothing for nothing in this world. But she was taking a curious tack. What interest could such things have for her? He wished, above all, that she had left Golightly's alone. He was in no mood for that spectre at the feast. He proposed a music-hall, the last two acts of a notorious play. There was just time. But no, Kitty voted it pleasanter here. Well, perhaps she was right. People had cleared away. They had the place almost to themselves. Perhaps it was only a little spice of feminine malice — for she no doubt had her own reasons for not loving Potiphar overmuch, that made her recall that tempestuous General Meeting. Still, seeing he too was a director, it was not the very button of tact. What was the little witch's game?

"I suppose Mr. G. was awfully upset?" Kitty remarked casually.

"Oh, he's an old hand. These little ripples are all in the day's work for a public man. It ended all right, you know."

"I suppose competition is very keen, nowadays."

"It's the life of trade," Dorian laughed.

"Not the death, then? I'm glad to hear it."

"What do you mean, Kitty?"

Kitty nibbled a chocolate. "I go about a lot. I

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hear things," she said, looking down at her fruit plate.

"But you know better than believe them."

"That depends on the source."

"Careful person! But surely, in this case, I'm nearest the fountain-head?"

Kitty looked up. She had caught her man's interest.

"Oh, no doubt it's all nonsense."

"If it's a fair question, K., what have you heard?"

"Rumours."

"Moonshine."

"No, they were of eclipse. Unless ——"

"Unless what? You amuse me."

"Unless certain people saw their way to certain things."

"Very possibly. No doubt certain other people know their neighbour's business best."

"Don't be snuffy, Dorian. I only thought I might be able to give you a useful hint. The mouse and the lion, you know."

"Forgive me, Mouse."

"All right. But if it bores you, we'll change the subject."

"It doesn't bore me in the least. Go on, please."

"If you wish it. But I suppose it's quite useless. Still there may be chances that one might be wise not to neglect. There are forces, and forces, you know. In extreme cases, sometimes, hope arises from the most unlikely quarters. Things quite hostile are not always so hostile as we suppose. And in these days even apparent irreconcilables often make common cause, where bigger results are to be expected."

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Dorian nodded. To what end these truisms? But they hit him. For some time past he had seen a vision, so remote and impossible as to be ludicrous, yet if it were feasible — he personally would not stand in the way. He had none of Potiphar's absurd conceit. But such a thing was purely chimerical. And how could this girl know anything? Yet she might. Many instruments were used in these times, and the eternal petticoat had its uses.

"I didn't know that business matters appealed to you," he said, after a pause.

"They interest me only where they interest my friends."

"Disinterested young woman!"

"I wonder," Kitty mused, lighting another cigarette. "Well, this has been all very vague and inconclusive. But I mean what I say, in fact, I know something. So if the chance comes, don't throw it away. It could come if you wanted it."

Dorian seized the bull by the horns. "Look here, Kitty, in business plain speaking is the only way. Has anybody put you up to say this to me?"

"I wouldn't say 'put me up.' But, as I say, I've had a glimpse into things, quite an inside view."

"Can you tell me in what quarter?"

"The most unlikely."

"Then it's a plant, my dear, and bodes no good to me. Thank you for letting me know. It was kind of you."

"I didn't mean it as a warning."

"Perhaps you don't quite see it as I do."

"Well, take it as you please. But remember, if you

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personally are in any danger, you can easily save yourself. I'd do it, and let all the world with its prejudices go hang. You're strong enough, if you care, to carry it through."

"But it would kill the old man. I believe it would be worse than an actual smash for him. To be forced to amalgamate with the enemy! Think of it, Kitty."

"I'd risk it. Union is strength."

"If we're good enough to take over, we're good enough to go on alone."

"You know best, of course. Anyhow, I've shown you that—the impossible may not be so impossible after all."

"Well, many thanks. But remember, I've shown no inclination to bite."

"I quite see that. We'll leave it there. Now I must go. It's getting very late."

In the cab they talked no more of cryptic "business." But Dorian's head was a medley of strange suggestions, contradictions, inquiries. It was a mad dream, yet the only sanity, but supposing it came to be seriously mooted, could he carry it? An extraordinary evening! Who would have thought that this easygoing little person could have touched themes so vitally important? And what had she to gain by it? With the question came the answer, not unpleasing, flattering even.

The flattery stirred him to something in which he had hitherto had small practice. Business faded away, pleasure only remained. He let pleasure have its swing. He found that he was not so ill-practised after all. And Kitty was nowise disinclined, it seemed. To-night she was prodigal of favours.

The glare of the whirling West End flashed by and

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gave place to quieter streets. Kitty, a warm bundle of contentment, took what the gods had given her, rather late, but still welcome. It had been long enough deferred to accentuate the boom; she was still young enough and fair enough to make what she gave well worth giving. She had been giving all along the line to-night; but no matter; it was, at last, Victory!

Such, for these two, unconscious of the fact, was the amazing work of Amelia's five pounds.

Kitty went upstairs singing softly to herself. She would sleep well, after achievement. There were no letters. She turned towards her bedroom door, but what was that, a light in her sitting-room. Very careless of her little maid. She went in, conscious of another presence. Huddled into an easy chair beside the dying fire —

Lynette!

The crouching figure moved wearily. A delicate little face, its soft, sensual, indeterminate contours drawn and sharpened with misery, looked up. Kitty was reminded of a dumb animal in pain.

"Oh, Kitty, here you are at last!"

"My dear, what's the matter?"

"Nothing, nothing, only I wanted to see you —"

She hid her face in her hands, and trembled. Kitty looked. No, the child was not crying. Was it terror, grief, or merely physical illness?

Kitty made up the fire and lighted her spirit lamp.
"Coffee, Lynette?"

"All right. I don't mind. Thank you."

Until it was ready Kitty sat beside the girl, holding

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her hand. "Try to stop shaking, dear." Her masterful tone, her firm clasp, steadied Lynette's nerves. Kitty drew the little head to her shoulder, and petted her guest baby fashion. She imagined possibilities, all wide of the mark, save in a single particular. But she asked no questions yet.

"Ah, the coffee is boiling now. See, drink this, and then we'll talk."

But after a perfunctory mouthful Lynette set down her cup. For the first time Kitty saw her eyes and feared their agony of alarm.

"Have you had a fright, Lynette?"

"Yes, no — not exactly."

Kitty, hoping against hope, took a lighter tone.

"Not quarrelled with anyone, have you?"

Lynette smiled wearily. "Oh, no."

"Then what, my dear child, is the meaning of all this? You *must* tell me. It's not fair to me."

Kitty's own nerves were threatening to rebel. After her moment of Paradise, to come face to face with this inexplicable little bundle of trouble, was unwelcome, disconcerting. It had broken the dream. "Surely you can tell me?"

Lynette buried her face in Kitty's shoulder again. "Oh, I can't, I can't. You'd hate me."

"Nonsense!" A strange fear shook Kitty as she protested. But — impossible! She still clung to the lighter probability. A little breeze, perhaps, and temper. Lynette took everything far too deeply. If she would only cry. The absence of tears was ominous. And again, these horrid tremors. Only sheer terror could be the cause. But this must be stopped.

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Kitty came behind Lynette and put her hands firmly on the girl's shoulders. "Stop that shaking," she said, "or I'll give you a good whipping."

The trembling ceased. Kitty had managed to put real meaning into her tone. She sat down again and used no more caresses. Ah! that was better! She allowed Lynette to cry her fill, and thought her own disquieting thoughts.

A light touch fell on her hand. "Come closer, Kitty."

Kitty leaned towards Lynette and listened, with wide-eyed distress, to the whispered story of poor little Amelia Jelks the Second. But it was Amelia Jelks with a difference. Kitty herself was not free of reproach in the matter. But she had never dreamed — oh, little boy Osric, little boy Osric! It was a fearful complication. But Miss Kitty Adderley was nothing if not practical. She set confusion of thought at defiance, and asked a quiet question.

"Well," she said, with firm finality, "there's only one thing to be done, dear. Thank Heaven, there's plenty of time. He must just fulfil his promise to you, Lynette, at once."

She kept Lynette with her for the night, and comforted her until, with the dawn, they both slept.

CHAPTER IX

FRUSTRATION

AMELIA, in these days, was ill at ease. One interest, once a solace, had not paled certainly for her, but it seemed less productive than aforetime. And she had other anxieties, anxieties that held a wild possibility not to be thought of. These very things, unthinkable as they were, might have held even some ray of hope, had the way they pointed not been slightly obscured by the indifference of one. Indifference was hardly the word, it was a difference rather, a preoccupation, with what? If only she knew. Potiphar's sly asides, in moments of genial effusiveness, now grown frequent again at eventide in defiance of all specialist authority, boded no good. But perhaps they arose only from his effervescent fancy. Still less good was boded by his way of life. It was quite notorious now.

"'A' was a merry man," one of the young bloods of the *Beacon*, an ardent Shakespearean, quoted to certain *confrères* in reference to the chief. "He's losing his grip."

Amelia at home saw that, more or less clearly, but what could she do? She was powerless. Pharie must go his way. So the merry man, at heart anything but merry, was left to his own pleasant diversions. Soothed thereby, he lapsed into optimism; hoped good things of his son and of the House. In the morning the clouds would again have descended. No matter. To-night was good.

THE GOLIGHTLYS: FATHER AND SON

Large, loud-voiced, uncertain, but still believing somehow in his own efficacy, the Captain of Industry, always marching with the times, as he dreamed, went stumbling towards the evil hour. And about him, though he knew it not, forces to which he would never bend, were subtly framing the only means of salvage. For the once great concern, perhaps yes, but for Potiphar, only the doom foreseen and foretold long since by J. A. Hay.

For a moment, into the welter had flashed a vision of reinforcement, countered as ever by the unexpected. The vision leaped from a letter Amelia had received from Lady Welshpoole.

She laid it down, smiling.

"You seem pleased, Amelia."

"I have reason. We have reason, always supposing certain things come about."

"Eh, what?"

"Hilda Thlangothlen has had a stroke of good luck. Her old uncle, Elizabeth's brother, old John Bingley, who made money — heaps — in South America, has just died, leaving Hilda everything."

Potiphar shook his head. "That puts Hilda into quite another market than ours. Mrs. W.'ll look out for a needy Duke now. Our poor lad's nose is out of joint, I fear."

"Not so fast, Pharie. Bingley was an absurd, socialistic, eccentric creature. Hilda's to get nothing unless and until she marries a commoner who works for his bread. Elizabeth will not like that, though, of course, she makes no comment. She can't, after all her eagerness to see Hilda and Osric come together."

"By gad!" said Potiphar. "That's a rum start."

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Well, Amelia, my dear, we must just help Lady Hilda to come into her money as soon as possible. First in the field has a pull. In this case a strong pull. There'll be a big field, but the boy must try his luck at once."

"Hilda really likes him, I'm sure," Amelia sighed, "but he's never troubled much about her."

"I'll talk to him," said Potiphar. "He'll soon see reason to buck up."

But Osric remained lukewarm. His mother hinted and cajoled, his father passed from suggestion to reasoning, from reasoning to orders, from orders to rage and threats. Finally Osric said he would consider the matter, if he were favoured with a salary more in accordance with his position and services.

Potiphar eyed the young man with grim humour. "Your position, my friend, depends entirely upon yourself; and your services don't amount to very much, as yet. And lately, you have not quite fulfilled the promise you gave at first. You are inattentive; your hours are not all they should be. You set a bad example. And, by the by, I heard something the other day. However, we'll say no more about that; boys will be boys, only keep your eyes outside the House. Now, if you'll be a bit steadier and give up slackness, I'm willing to put up your screw a bit — and you'll consider your mother's wishes and mine. There's nothing would please us better, Osric."

But Osric had caught at only one phrase. He ignored the promise.

"I say, father, what did you hear about me? It's only fair to tell me, so that I can defend myself, if it's any disgraceful lie."

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"Oh, not disgraceful, only indiscreet. I hear that you've been seen about sometimes with a little girl who writes stories for the *Flapper*. Now that sort o' thing won't do, my boy. It leads to endless trouble. You can't keep your end up, if you take up with young women of that stamp; unless, of course, you marry 'em. And the cases in which that's feasible are not usual, not usual. Better things are in store for you, Osric. Now don't let me hear of any foolery of this sort. Your new salary will begin this month." Potiphar, with Lady Hilda in his eye, placed the figure higher than his business instinct at all approved. The boy seemed disproportionately pleased. Mr. Golightly believed the battle won and confided the opinion to the wife of his bosom, more or less, but rather less than more nowadays. Well, that was not his fault. But people grew staid, with advancing years. Amelia took his news sceptically. She doubted the tactics.

"I don't quite know what's the matter with Osric," she sighed. "I sometimes think he has something on his mind. He's not the boy he was."

Potiphar made no comment, but he caught at his wife's remark and remembered. One afternoon he descended on Miss Swillett.

"You used to have nice taking little stories by Miss What's-er-name," he began, turning over the leaves of the current *Flapper*. "I don't see them so often now. Why's that?"

"Miss Holiday, you mean, Mr. Golightly?"

"Yes, that was the name. Did she fall off?"

"No, but she's almost given up the work. She wrote me that she was to be married and was going away to

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live in the country. I take a story when she sends me one now and again. Lately I've had nothing from her."

"Oh, all right. Pity she couldn't keep it up. She was quite what the *Flapper* wants. Well, there's as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it. But Mrs. Golithly thought a lot of Miss—thank you—Holiday's work. She wondered what had become of her. She always reads your little paper with pleasure. Good afternoon, Miss Swillet."

Well, so far so good, the little minx was out of the way, it seemed. Potiphar returned to his room. Then—oh, Lord!—but no, such an idea was too much. Still, Potiphar harked back to his own youth—

He took up the telephone and rang through to the *Flapper*.

"By the by, Miss Swillet, do you happen to know that little lady's married name? No. Still signs her maiden name, eh? *Was* it her real name? You don't know? Oh, no matter; it's of no consequence. Thank you."

Dismay and suspicion laid hold of Potiphar. He took out an anonymous letter of some age and read it again.

"Sir,—It may interest you to know that your son goes out a lot with Miss Holiday who writes for the *Flapper*.—A WELL-WISHER."

The thing was typewritten and bore no possible clue. Some wretched little female, no doubt, who had fancied the boy herself. Confound her jealousy! He wished he had never given it a moment's thought. But the boy had made no denial when he was warned, and now, and

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now — the girl was married and gone away. Married! Oh, he was an old fool. His other worries were getting at him. No more of this, no more.

But Amelia had said she thought the boy had something on his mind! Women were quick to see that sort of thing. Oh, Lord! oh, Lord! He must get this thing settled or he would go mad. The old P. Golightly would not thus have yielded to panic, but the former man had been sapped by the good things of this life.

Potiphar rang the bell. "Ask Mr. Osric to step this way."

The son faced the father, without apprehension. Such summonses were too usual to cost one a second thought.

"Sit down, Osric, I've something to say to you."

Osric sat down. He did not quite like this formality.

"I'm glad to know that you've quite given up that little piece of folly I spoke to you about — you remember?"

Osric nodded.

"You were only being fooled, you see. That's usually the way. The lady had someone else on hand all the time, it appears."

"That's a dirty lie!" Osric screamed, startled out of all caution.

"Naturally *you* think so, but the facts are otherwise. Miss Swillet tells me the lady's married and gone away. Now," said Potiphar, changing his tone, "can you tell me whom she married?"

"I — I — really don't know. How should I?"

Potiphar looked hard at his son. "Is she married, Osric?"

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"I tell you I don't know. It doesn't concern me. I refuse to be cross-questioned like a criminal." He rose and was going to the door.

"Sit down, Osric. I'm not satisfied. I'm going to the bottom of this, cost what it may."

"You have no right to question me, sir, like a clerk caught robbing the till. I won't stand it. Because I went out once or twice with a pretty girl and some cad peached, and then the girl gets married, do you suppose there was nobody in the world but me for a bridegroom?"

"I've been using my eyes lately and putting things together, Osric. Now, no bluster; it won't help you. I'm going to put a plain question to you."

"Well?"

"Have you any intention of ever proposing to Hilda Thlangothlen?"

"All in good time."

"Why delay?"

"I don't like Hilda Thlangothlen."

"Is there any other reason why you shouldn't ask her?"

"Surely that's sufficient."

"I say, is there any other?"

"No." He could not meet his father's eye.

"Very well. I must take your word for it, but remember I can easily ascertain if my suspicion is correct. I will inquire at Somerset House. If I find you've lied to me, out you go, and I forget that I had a son. I give you one more chance."

Potiphar would have made a good Inquisitor. In his best days he had been terrible to offenders; he was still

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formidable. Osric was not of the stuff to withstand the mental rack with which his father had enforced the question. His secret, carried for many weeks, at first with elation, then with fear, had unnerved him. The game was up. With tears he confessed; abject, he begged forgiveness.

When he dared to look up, it seemed to him that his father had grown very old before his eyes.

Potiphar sat silent, fumbling with a paper-knife. He rose heavily. "Let us go home, Osric," he said. "I don't know how I am to tell your mother."

CHAPTER X

EXIT POTIPHAR

FROM that day Potiphar was plainly a broken man. The domestic storm raged and passed, ending as such things do, in compromise. The story of Amelia Jelks the Second, writer of little romances, had no romance for Amelia Jelks the First. But Osric was Osric; her boy who had turned out an unsatisfactory man, but in her eyes more sinned against than sinning. The hussy had entrapped him, of course. It was the fault of forcing him into the business. When Osric pleaded to be allowed to go abroad with Lynette, Amelia supported him, and at length Potiphar gave a reluctant consent. Osric would never be of any real use to the House. That had been plain for some time. Amelia sighed as she thought of the diplomatic service and Hilda Thlangothlen. Dreams, dreams!

At the House itself things were ripe for crisis. Dorian had not been inactive. Kitty's suggestions wrought potently in his mind. There were comings and goings, secret, cautious; feelers thrown out, touch obtained; views exchanged, assurances given. All might yet be well. Dorian and Kitty still kept their own counsel about what most intimately concerned themselves. They went their way lightly, believing in their happiness. To Kitty alone came a shade of misgiving. On that memorable night she had been too happy to be definite.

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But they understood each other, without formal words spoken. Very soon now everything would be arranged, and then ——— Meanwhile, Kitty was above anxiety. She flitted about, the gay butterfly of old. Her lover made all things easy.

Outside the web stood Potiphar, more and more the prey of his inclinations. He was left outside of set purpose. After that one perverse flare of action that drove him to play the merciless Inquisitor, his powers had declined rapidly. Apathy began to settle upon him like a thick cloud.

"More and more obfuscated," said one of the bright young men, winking.

No longer forced to reckon with a vigilant eye, Stepney pursued his policy untrammelled. Gradually, by deft manœuvring, he won all the directors to his view. When the time was ripe, he struck.

Potiphar came down to the Board and went dull-eyed through formal business. "Well," he said at last, "that's about all to-day; shall we adjourn?"

The directors looked at each other and then at Stepney.

"Anything more?" Potiphar asked irritably. He was impatient to be gone. Business was only a worry now.

"There is a proposal," Stepney began, "of some moment to the firm."

"Why wasn't it on the agenda paper? I rule it out of order. However, if it's not long, let's hear it."

"I am empowered," Dorian went on, while the others watched Potiphar curiously, "to convey to the Board a proposition that may or may not be favourably received. Of late years, unfortunately, our returns have

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not been quite what they were. Competition ——”

“Oh, don’t make a song about it, Stepney. We know all that, worse luck. Come to the point, man!” Potiphar seemed to have revived. He was alert, suspicious. Men had a glimpse of a man they had known long ago. “Come to the point and have done.”

“The proposal, then, is for amalgamation ——”

“With whom?”

“The *Torch* and Allied Journals.”

Potiphar’s laugh seemed to echo from a tomb. “I like their impudence,” he tried. “Well, that’s easily settled. You might have refused off hand to entertain it, Stepney. It’s undignified to have considered it at the Board. Rejected *nem. con.*, gentlemen, I suppose? Eh, what’s that, Anderson?”

“I question, Mr. Golightly, whether we can afford to treat it so casually as all that. It seems to me, perhaps the only way of retrieving our position ——”

“What—you don’t say you’re in favour? It’s rank treachery!”

“I am in favour of the scheme. More, I move its adoption, subject to satisfactory terms.”

Potiphar gloomed and looked away from Anderson. His chosen crony!

“And I second,” said Dorian quietly.

“Any amendment?” Potiphar asked, with a dry tongue. Was the meeting packed against him?

Silence reigned at the table. There was no amendment.

Potiphar saw the writing on the wall.

“You are a pack of traitors! I will fight this to the end single-handed. I’ll summon an Extraord ——”

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He gasped, clutched his breast, and fell backwards in his chair.

Punchie Hay's work was all but complete.

Dorian, even as he rushed to support his fallen chief, caught sight once more of a Cleared Road, but one from which the glory had departed.

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Golightly rallied for a time, but the Dooms were set. Amid the empty splendours of Queen's Gate, he lay, for the most part apathetic, dumbly acquiescent in the decree of Fate. At times he mumbled curses on those whom he counted his betrayers, on one in chief. Amelia listened in frozen horror.

"Pharie," she said one day, "wouldn't you like to see the boy? He is coming. He will be here very soon now."

"What's the use?" the sick man asked. "But let him come. It hardly matters." Then the clouds came up, and Potiphar babbled of green fields, of Marsh-by-the-Pound, of early triumphs. Once more he was courting his Ameliar. Mrs. Golightly sent the nurse out of the room and wept in silence. For her, too, the road, soon to be cleared, was stripped of glamour now. The last months had written their record deep upon her face, and with it the long-deferred record of years had also been revealed. But, as Pharie said, it scarcely mattered.

She would see her boy again. That was some comfort. She hoped, as a woman will, without reason, that at the sight of his son, Potiphar would relent. The boy, she knew, was to inherit very little. There was still time, possibly, for reparation.

On a day of clearer thought Potiphar seemed uneasy.

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He asked to see his solicitor. Amelia took courage. By afternoon Osric would be here. Perhaps, perhaps, the old will would be cancelled even before the boy had come. But she had to curb curiosity, for Potiphar desired to be alone with the man of law.

"Ah, Sarratt," he said, "it's up to me now."

The solicitor murmured empty, hopeful common-places.

"Ah, no, no, Sarratt. I'm tore out." He lay for a while silent.

"I've been thinking, Sarratt, about lots of things; old things. They come back to a man, lyin' here. There was that boy, you know."

"Ah, yes."

"I would like to do a bit more for him, after all. Between you and me, Sarratt, I'm some shrunk, but there's something over still and Amelia no worse off."

The lawyer smiled, well pleased. "You wish to make a new will in Mr. Osric's favour, then?"

"There, now you make a mistake, Sarratt. It wasn't Osric I was thinking about at all. Don't you recollect?"

"Ah, yes; but, Mr. Golightly, you did more than handsomely. You never wanted particulars, but he got a capital education. Then I lost sight of him, my duty being done."

"Can't you trace him?"

"It might not be impossible."

"It's got to be possible. Do you know, I never inquired what name he went by. Did he take his mother's?"

"No; but you are exciting yourself, my dear sir."

"I am not. I'll talk my business out, Sarratt. Once

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I thought I'd seen him. His mother's image in the face ; but it was all nonsense, all nonsense. It bothers me though. Now, Sarratt, tell me his name, if you can remember it."

The lawyer pressed his finger to his forehead, hesitating. Potiphar knit suspicious brows.

"Now, Sarratt, out with it. I never knew you forget a name. It will be kindness to a dying man ; for that old fancy torments me."

"I beg you, Mr. Golightly ——" Sarratt protested.

Potiphar struggled up on his pillows and pointed a finger at the lawyer.

"Out with it. It's to ease my mind."

Either way was hopeless.

"His name," said Mr. Sarratt, "is James Alexander Hay."

"God Almighty!"

Potiphar gasped and fell back.

The lawyer hastened to the door. Along the corridor Amelia and Osric came towards him.

"What is wrong, Mr. Sarratt? Is Mr. Golightly worse?"

"I fear so." He would have kept Amelia back, but she pushed past him and entered.

"Am I too late, Mr. Sarratt?" Osric asked.

The lawyer bowed his head.

CHAPTER XI

LAST WORDS

THE last words fell, of right, to the Prime Mover. Potiphar gone, nothing remained to obstruct amalgamation. It went forward by gradual and satisfactory steps to completion. Those concerned foresaw advantage; the elimination of a wearing element of struggle from both sides would make for efficiency. There would still be stimulus of friendly rivalry. Neither institution would desire to be outstripped by the other. Virtually, each was to retain its individuality. Punchie looked at his finished work well pleased. He had been justified of his foresight. This was better than ruining Golightly's. And the personal thrust had gone home as he had prophesied. Henceforward he would take life somewhat easier. The future was assured for his one interest, little Barbara.

On a day somewhat later a curious point came before the notice of the Joint-Board. It was introduced by Dorian.

"I have here," he said, "a rather strange application. Osric Golightly, it seems, has fallen on very evil times."

"That has nothing to do with us," Stingo remarked. "Can't his mother do anything for him? She wasn't so badly left; although the old man's affairs were more involved than people imagined."

"He would have been all right at long as she lives,

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no doubt, although she couldn't leave him a penny. The old man tied her up very tight. But Osric made a great mistake with his mother. He presented his wife to her, unasked, hoping for a reconciliation. Mrs. Golightly was mortally offended."

"Fool," said Rheingold. "Well, as Sir Bradford says, young Golightly's difficulties don't concern us. Is he asking money?"

"No, he wants work. Any small position thankfully received. His wife did a bit for us, and kept things going, but lately she's been unable."

"We have no vacancy at present," the shibboleth dropped easily from Rheingold's tongue.

Punchie had listened in silence, a monument of sardonic irony. He made to speak, but Anderson interposed.

"Give the poor chap a trifle," he suggested, "from ourselves. I'll go a fiver. I always liked the boy, though he was a square peg in a round hole."

"No," said Hay; "no charity. He wants work. Let him have it. As it happens, there is extra pressure in *Sundays Well-Spent*. Our friend, Dr. Durfey, has organised a monster competition, which has succeeded, like everything he touches, to admiration. The sacks of letters, he tells me, are more than his boys can manage. Durfey is giving away Bibles wholesale to all competitors who reach a certain standard. Each copy to be signed by the Editor with his good wishes. Thomas, of course, must do his signing by proxy. He's a busy man. And the checking of the competition schedules also calls for extra help. We can well afford it, for the scheme has driven up *Sundays Well-Spent* by many tens of thousands. I think I see pleasant and profitable, if mechanical, work

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for Mr. Osric Golightly. His business incapacity won't matter. And there is always something of the same kind on hand. Let us make him Competition Clerk, at, say, three pounds a week; extravagant, perhaps, but in the circumstances, permissible."

"It's rather high," Stingo objected. "You'd get a woman to do it at thirty shillings."

"But the Bibles must be signed in a neat, scholarly hand becoming to Thomas Durfey, D.D.," Dorian remarked. "Osric has that qualification, at least." As he spoke, he put in the letter in evidence.

"Oh, give the lad his three quid and have done," Anderson grunted. "I want to get out to lunch."

"Two's ample," Stingo protested.

"Say three until the lady is able to take up her *Flapper* stories again." This from Rheingold. "I suppose her inactivity is due to the usual cause, Stepney? This will be the second, won't it?"

Dorian nodded; and at that they left it.

The Board rose and began to melt away. Dorian departed scarcely satisfied. Of late the problem of Osric had pressed on him in more ways than one. He had called on Amelia, with the intention of saying an opportune word in Osric's favour, but the interview had languished and never touched intimacy. Mrs. Golightly made a superb widow, but plainly she had aged. Over her and Dorian brooded the constraint of people who wish to forget. They met in commonplace, and in commonplace they parted.

At the door of the *Torch* building Dorian turned back. He had forgotten to say something to Stingo. Sir Bradford's room adjoined the Board Room, with which it

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communicated. Dorian entered and found it empty. Stingo was still loitering in the council chamber with Hay. Their voices came through the half-open communicating door. He paused, not intending to play eavesdropper, but Fate left him no choice. Before he could reach the Board Room, they had said their say.

"We forgot to congratulate Stepney," Hay was saying. "He's just told me he's to be married almost at once."

"Ho, ho!" Sir Bradford answered, with his rolling laugh. "Happy man. Who's the fair lady?"

"Miss Adderley; old Hiram's daughter. You remember? I wish him joy of his bargain. I've more than a suspicion that for a good while she was one of our dear friend Solomon's very particular friends."

Postponing his business with Sir Bradford, Dorian left the room on tiptoe, and passed out into the swirl of Fleet Street, that seemed dead calm to the riot in his brain.

It might be only calumny, that wasp-tongued scandal of Hay's. But let it be as false as hell, all was changed now; for with the words had come a lightning revelation of truths, truths that would not be gainsaid. For what had he played that day when he made his game and dispensed with ideals? Dust and ashes, dust and ashes! For these, too, had Potiphar played, but always up to his lights, a Titan blundering gamely to the last grapple with a Fate too strong for him. It was otherwise with Dorian, the delicate trifler with forbidden things. He had denied the light, and now—and now. What was he? The tool of more skilful gamblers than himself.

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That and more. The tool of a tool. Oh, Kitty, Kitty! Too plainly the willing instrument of Rheingold. A momentary vision of Amelia, of a Barred Road, faded before that of Osric, condemned, through Dorian's act of would-be kindness distorted by a mocking Destiny, to mean servitude. Dust and ashes, dust and ashes!

The late placards of that evening's papers flared with an announcement in large type that set London agog for twenty-four hours:

"SUICIDE OF A FAMOUS EDITOR"

The finding of a sapient coroner's jury ran—"Temporary insanity occasioned by overwork."

After his kind, Mr. James Alexander Hay had also his word of comment.

Said Punchie, "Oh, what a farce is life!"

But far away, in his quiet rooms at Craven, the Master read the news, and sighing, looked once more at his picture of the Devil playing chess for a man's soul.

THE END

SEP 27 1913

DUE NOV 13 1920

OCT 22 1913

DUE MAR 6 1926

NOV 6 1916

~~DUE MAR 1 1926~~

NOV 29 1917

~~DUE MAR 1 1926~~

DUE MAR 13 1917

DUE AUG 3 1916

DUE NOV 11 1920

